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## ABSTRACT

In this series of booklets, eight Florida animals describe their appearance, habitats, food, behavior, and relationships with humans. Each entry is written for elementary students from the animal's point of view and includes a bibliography. Contained are the life stories of the bald eagle, black bear, Florida panther, gopher tortoise, Eastern indigo snake, manatee, otter, and raccoon. (WE)

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# BALD EAGLE

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IF ANIMALS COULD TALK

SE 034 055

**BALD EAGLE**

**ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

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The School Board of Pinellas County, Florida

Dr. Gus Sakkis  
Superintendent of Schools

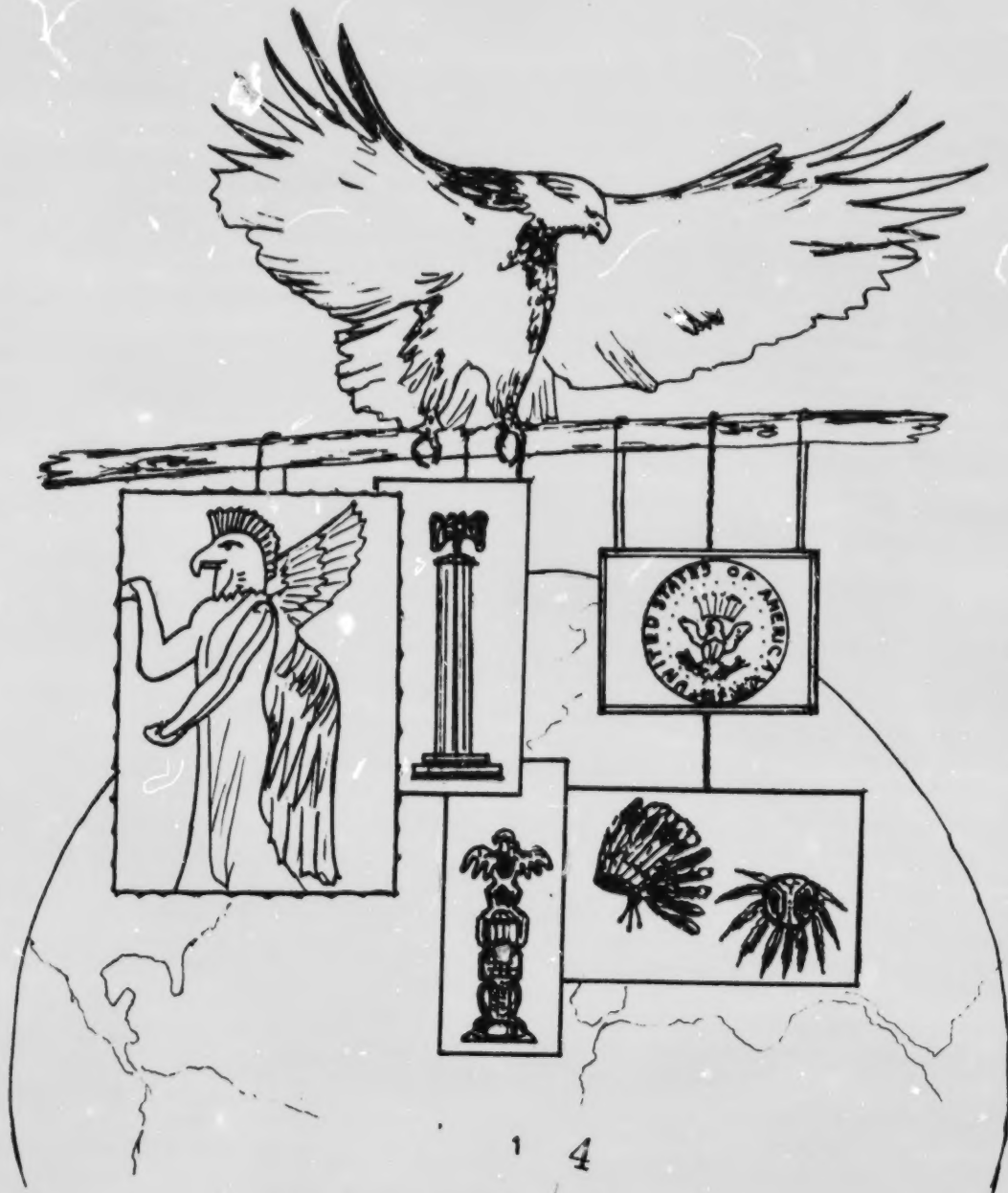
John A. Blank  
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Anderson Environmental Education Center - Sawgrass Lake

1979

## IF BALD EAGLES COULD TALK

What tales we could tell! How for thousands of years people around the world have held us sacred, considered us as symbols of power and strength, repeated tales of our heroic deeds and made us part of their legends and myths. From ancient Egypt and Greece, during the reign of the Roman emperors, through to the selection of the Bald Eagle as the symbol for the United States of America in 1782, man has revered us as an emblem of courage and victory.





Man has used many words to describe eagles; assigning qualities to us that he values. Therefore, he calls us - proud, majestic, stern, fierce, regal. In earlier times, the word bald meant white or white-faced, so we were named the Bald or White-headed or American Eagle.

There are only two species of eagles in North America- the Golden Eagles and the Bald Eagles. Sometimes, an immature Bald Eagle may be mistaken for a Golden Eagle. We are brown all over and do resemble the Golden Eagle, until we acquire our mature coat of feathers. It takes about five years before we have our adult plumage. Then you can identify us by our:



By then, we will be about three feet in length with a wingspan of six to eight feet and we will weigh from 10 to 13 pounds. If you see a pair of us, the larger is the female.

Bald Eagles mate for life. The male eagle will claim his territory by flying over it and calling loudly; he may even battle another male for it. The tallest pine or cypress near a lake or river or near the coast would be a likely choice for the eyrie (nest). Together the pair will build a nest or add on to one year after year.

The male will carry sticks, dead branches, Spanish moss, bark, green leaves, etc. to the nest where the female will arrange the materials.. If a nest has been added onto annually, (yearly), it may become huge. Some have measured six to eight feet deep.

Flat-topped, except for a shallow, soft center prepared for the clutch, (a nest of eggs) the nest is ready for usually two eggs. They are white with a grainy texture. These are usually laid starting in late October. If the first set of eggs is lost, the female may lay another set as late as February.

*Can you find the eagle in its nest?*



During an incubation period of about five weeks, both parents warm and tend to the eggs. After the baby eagle hatches, it is covered with fine, light down. It weighs about three ounces and is only a few inches long. The eaglet will be cared for by both parents until it is about three months old.



Usually, the mother feeds the ever hungry eaglet the food that the father has carried to the nest. Eating several meals a day, the eaglet grows rapidly. The eaglet's weight is nearly half that of an adult at the age of three weeks. A second dark-gray covering replaces the first down. This will stay even after the full coat of feathers has appeared.

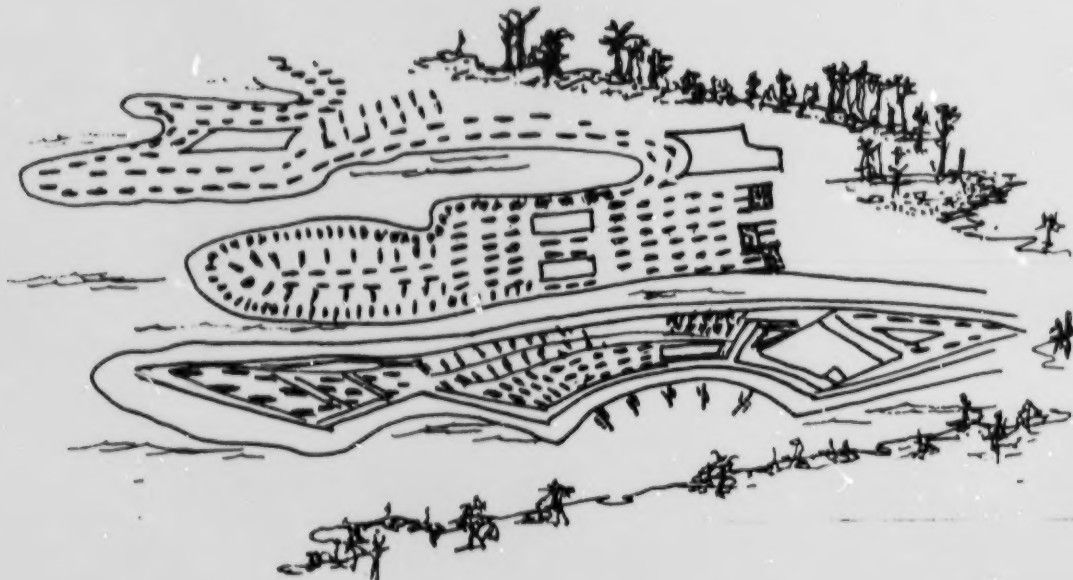
About three months after hatching, the little eagle is ready to fly; a few practice exercises above the nest before the first flight. And then the gliding, soaring, swooping that man marvels at but to the eagle is his "way of life."



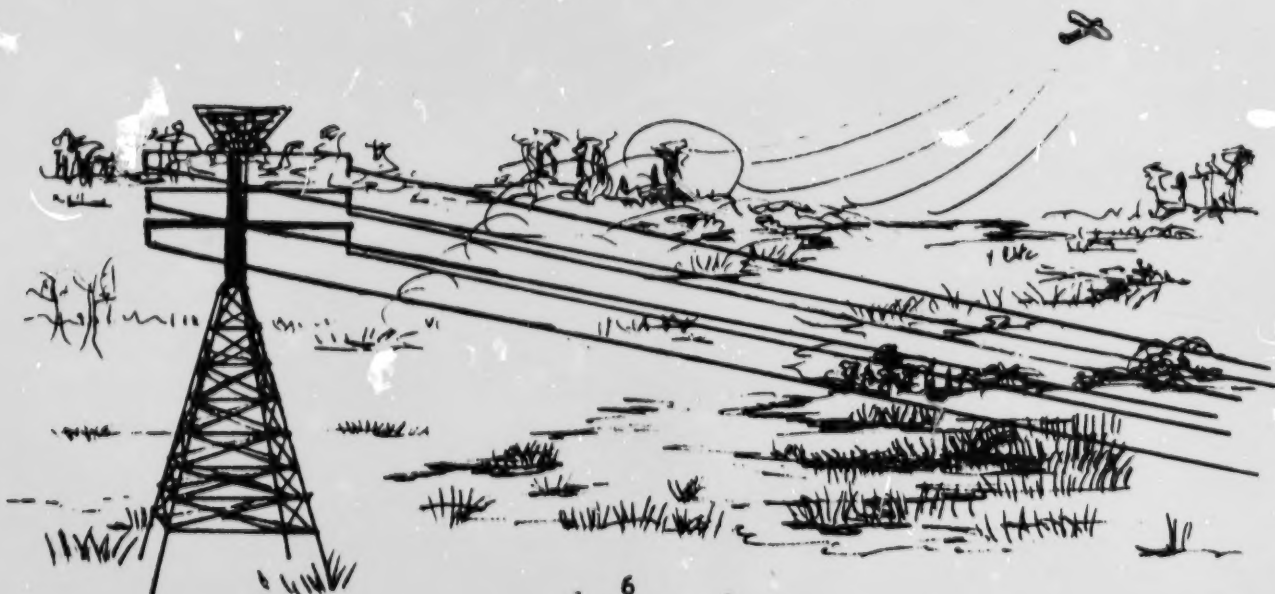


Catching a thermal (up draft of air), he can view the waters beneath him for his favorite food - catfish, mullet and shad. The Bald Eagle is a raptor (a bird that eats other birds) and adds variety to his fish diet with waterfowl, such as ducks, coots or herons. He will eat what ever is available and easy to hunt - be it turtles, rabbits, carrion or a fish snatched from an prey. With his speed and strong talons, the Bald Eagle is an excellent hunter.





One of the Bald Eagle's problems is that man is covering his wild regions with farms, highways, and towns. This destruction of our habitat has been a major cause of the decline of the Bald Eagle in Florida. If that isn't bad enough, the pesticides sprayed to kill insects have poisoned the fish that the eagles eat. Sometimes this will kill the eagles outright or cause their eggs to be infertile or the shell to be so thin that it can't protect the baby eagle. Another danger is electrocution on power lines used as perches by the eagles.





Despite these problems, the Florida Bald Eagle population now is about 1200. Most of us live in or near Ocala National Forest or Everglades National Park. Although the Bald Eagle is protected by state and national laws, the greatest need today is the protection of our nesting colonies. If this is done, then the eagle may soar forever.

If you really want to protect us:

1. Locate all our nesting territories.
2. Protect our undisturbed buffer and nesting sites.
3. Protect our nesting habitat on private lands.



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# BEAR



IF ANIMALS COULD TALK

AM

BEAR

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Written and illustrated  
by  
Abbielynn Martin

The School Board of Pinellas County, Florida

Dr. Gus Sakkis  
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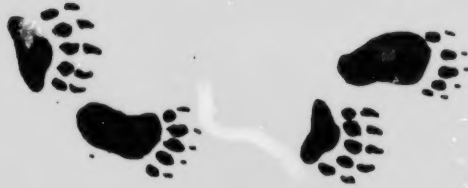
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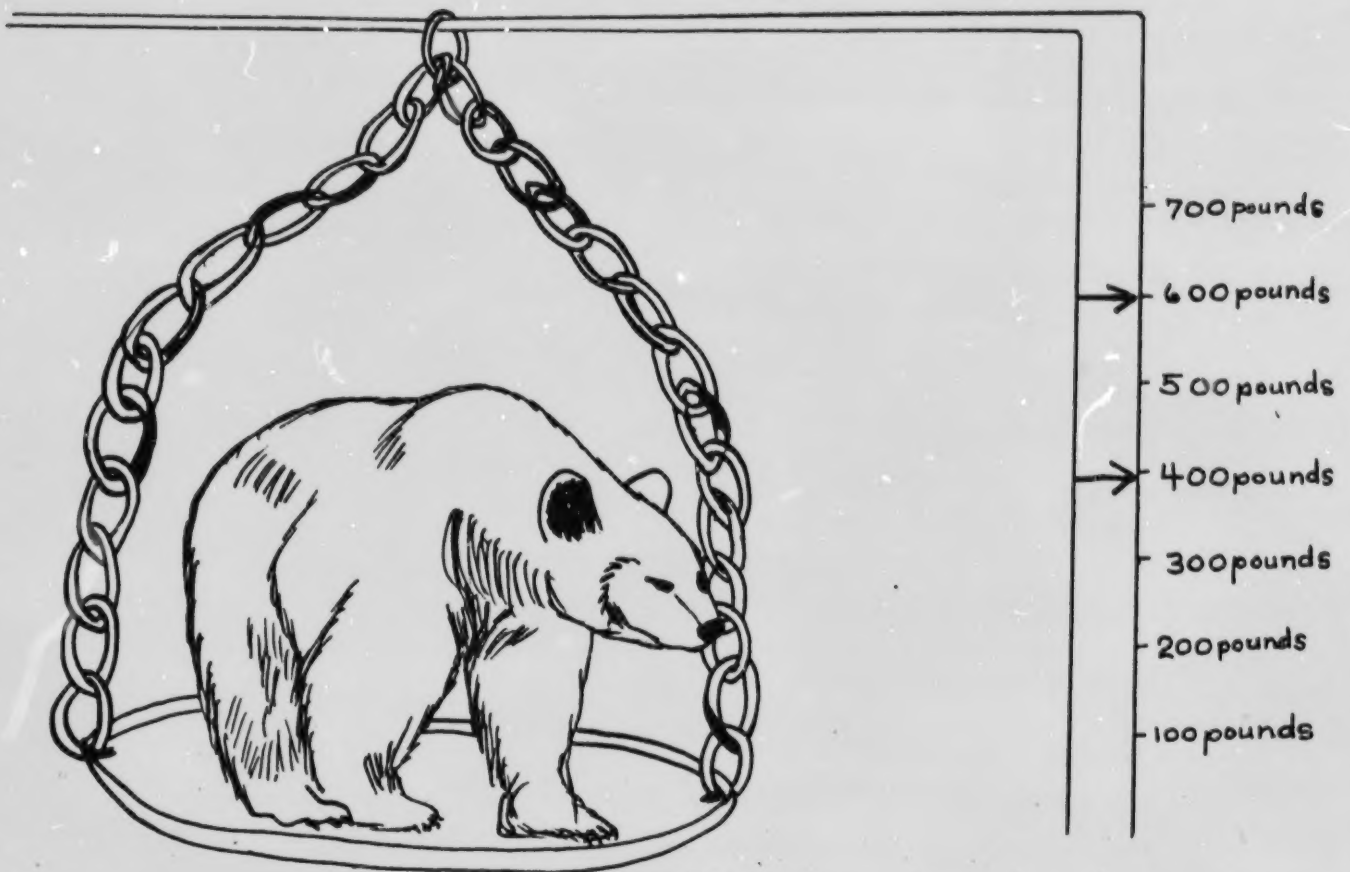
IF FLORIDA BLACK BEARS COULD TALK



I am not a teddy bear that sits on your bed. I am not the bear you hear about in fairy stories. I am a real Florida Black Bear.

I like to live and roam alone in the forests. I like to be where others can not see me. I spend most of my time alone looking for interesting things to eat. I stay mostly in my own territory and usually follow the same paths again and again. I look for good places where I can scratch my body. Most important is food. It takes a lot of food to fill up a big animal like myself.





I am not the largest bear in the world. I am the only wild bear in Florida. Florida Black Bears grow to be about 400 pounds, although some may weigh as much as 600 pounds. I am usually five to six feet tall, if I stand on my hind-legs.

Most black bears, of course, are black in color, with some white markings on their chests. Sometimes a black bear will be born with brown, tan, or even bluish fur. Our fur is coarse and heavy. I keep mine clean by licking. I also take bathes in mud, dust, and water. I love to swim.





As to what I look like, how can you mistake a bear. We are big, heavy-set animals. We have short tails, flat feet with sharp, heavy claws, and long, wide heads. Even though I am heavy and close to the ground, I can be very quick. I can move very quickly to catch something I want to eat or to escape a hunter.

My body is very strong. I can stand upright on my hind-legs. I can climb trees, especially when I am young.



My claws make wonderful tools. I can tear at logs to find insects. I can dig out small animals that hide.



I can even pick up small acorns and berries. My claws are called "fixed" meaning I can not pull them in like a cat.

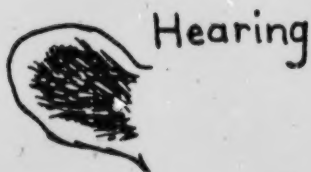
One important thing about my face is my nose. It is straight and flat from my eyes to the very tip. It is not like a grizzly bear's nose, which is "sunken". My nose does a lot of work for me, because my eyesight is not very good. I also hear very well. With these two strong senses, smell and hearing, I get along very well.



Black Bear



Grizzly Bear

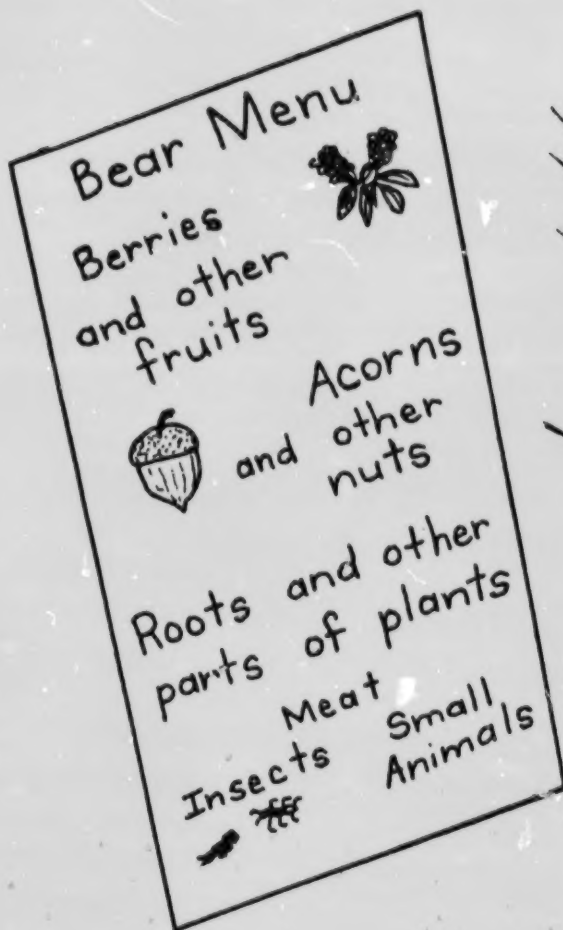


Hearing

Smell







My nose is very important to me in finding food. Florida Black Bears are very interested in finding food. Most of my diet is made up of fruits and vegetables. Do you like fruits and vegetables? I like berries best of all---they are my favorite fruit. I eat nuts, like acorns, and I eat the buds and roots of many plants. I am also a meat eater. I eat insects, frogs, toads, and small animals. I have been known to eat farm animals. That has happened as people and their animals have moved closer to the places where I live.





One of my favorite foods is honey. I really like the sweet taste. I will eat the honey from a bee tree even though the bees sting me. It doesn't hurt too much, except when they sting my nose. "Honey" has been another area where I have run into trouble with people.

Many people keep bees for their honey. The honey is important to the people. They do not like it when I take honey from their bee hives. I don't mean to steal the honey from the farmer, I just think all honey is meant for me. Some bears have been killed because of this taste for honey. Farmers are protecting their living.

Thanks to some people who want to help protect the black bear, there are better ways of protecting people's property. There are ways of protecting bee hives so that I can not get to the honey.



We can  
help protect  
the bears.

Wildlife agencies will sometimes trap live bears.  
They take us to a new area where we can roam free  
without bothering farmers, their animals, or their honey.

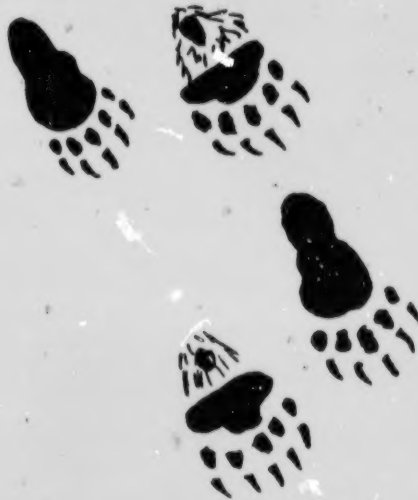


No matter where a bear lives, he likes to have  
trees around. A tree is the best place to rub a back.  
There is nothing I like better than to scratch my back  
on a tree.



All bears have a way of "blazing" trees. We rear up on our hind-feet, clawing and biting the bark of the tree up as far as we can reach. Some people believe we do this to mark our territories. Others believe it is to prove we are the largest animal around. Still others believe we do it for exercise or just out of boredom. Why do you think we "blaze" trees?

Not all bears can climb trees. Florida Black Bears do climb trees. It is especially important for young black bears to be able to climb trees. This can be a place safe from danger.







Most of the time there are two bear cubs born to a mother bear. There can be from one to six cubs, but two is the most common. Usually cubs are born between December and February. This is the time when you usually think of bears sleeping. Some bears do sleep during the cold winters of the north. But even then they can wake up at any time. Bears in Florida do sleep sometimes during this time of the year. But not as much as bears do where it snows.

Black bears usually make a den of any sort of brush around on the ground. It can be near a ledge, or even under branches drooping from a tree.



The bear cubs are very small when they are born. They are usually seven inches to a foot long and weigh from one to two pounds. The young bears nurse from the mother's milk. They will leave the den at about two months.

The she-bears will take care of and raise the cubs. The he-bears will not be around at all. The mother bear will teach the cubs how to find food by turning over rocks and picking fruit from bushes. The mother black bear is very strict with her babies. She will cuff the cubs with her paw to show them she means business.

When I was a young black bear cub, my mother would send my brother and me up a tree to be safe. We would always stay in the tree until our mother called us to come down. Of course, we were playful bears and enjoyed going off to investigate things of interest. Bear cubs can always find ways to get into trouble.



Young bears stay with their mothers for a long time, sometimes two years. She-bears only have litters of cubs every two or three years. Bears two to three years old, usually go off to their own dens, then off to lives of their own.

Hunting bears has long had a special attraction for man. Long ago, hunting bears was done for protection of home and property. Then it was done for fur and money. Now it is done mostly for sport. Because of the fears and legends that surround the bear, it still holds some magic for people to shoot a bear. I hope most people will only want to "shoot" bears with a camera.

I am off now to look for food. It seems if I am not sleeping, I am looking for food---berries, insects, honey. Do you know where I can find an old log? We can turn it over and look for yummy insects to eat. Yummy! Yummy! Do you like insects?



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# FLORIDA PANTHER



IF ANIMALS COULD TALK

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**FLORIDA PANTHER**

**ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

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**The School Board of Pinellas County, Florida**

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Executive Assistant Superintendent  
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**Anderson Environmental Education Center - Sawgrass Lake**

**1979**

# IF FLORIDA PANTHERS COULD TALK

You will need to listen carefully if you want to hear a Florida panther. For our voices in the wilderness are becoming fewer and fewer. At one time our species, the Puma, lived in most parts of the North American Continent. We ranged from the northwestern forests of Washington to the swamps of Florida; high in the Rocky Mountains, deep in the canyons of Arizona.



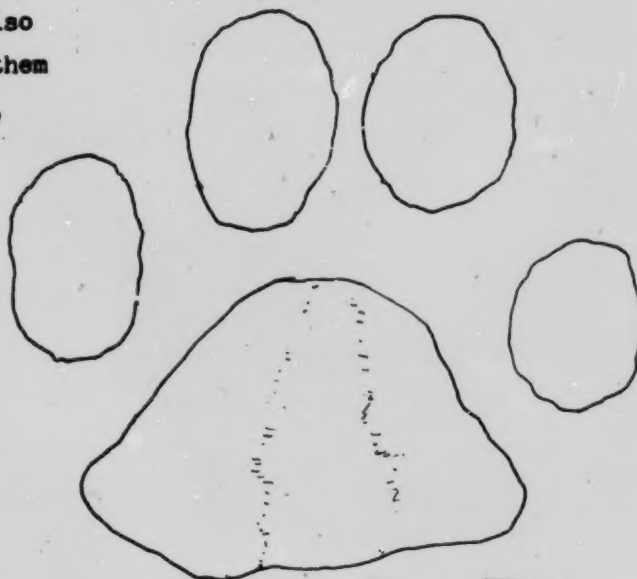
In particular we, the Florida panther, roamed in great numbers throughout the lower southeastern states. Now, we have retreated to the most remote spots in Florida that we can find: the Everglades-Big Cypress Swamp area, Myakka River State Park, Fakahatchee Strand near Lake Okeechobee and Ocala National Forest.



Just as the Indians called us by many names, the English settlers also had several names for us. Some of them were Panther, Mountain Lion, Cougar, Puma, Catamount, Painter and Varmint.



In fact, when the first explorers saw us they thought that we were lions. We surely must have frightened them because we were the most "dreaded beast" in early American folklore. Maybe it was the chilling cries they heard or, perhaps, it was our size. How would you feel if you came across tracks like ours in the woods?



Front Foot

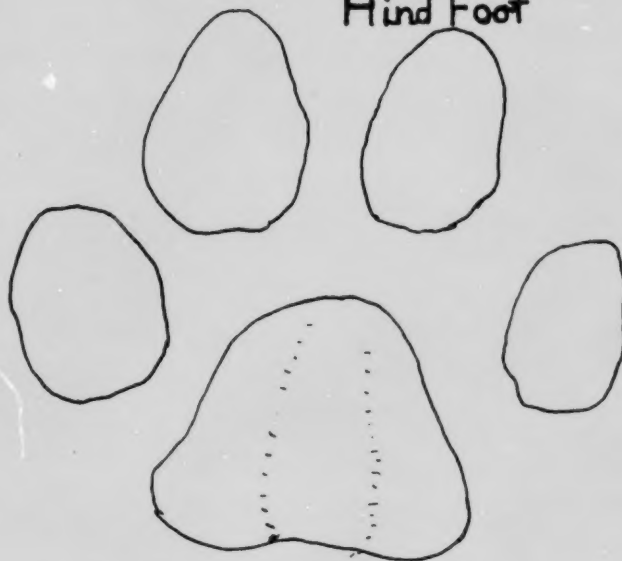
*Tracks usually are in a straight line.*

*Retractable (drawn in) claws do not show.*

*Tracks evenly spaced.*

ACTUAL  
SIZE

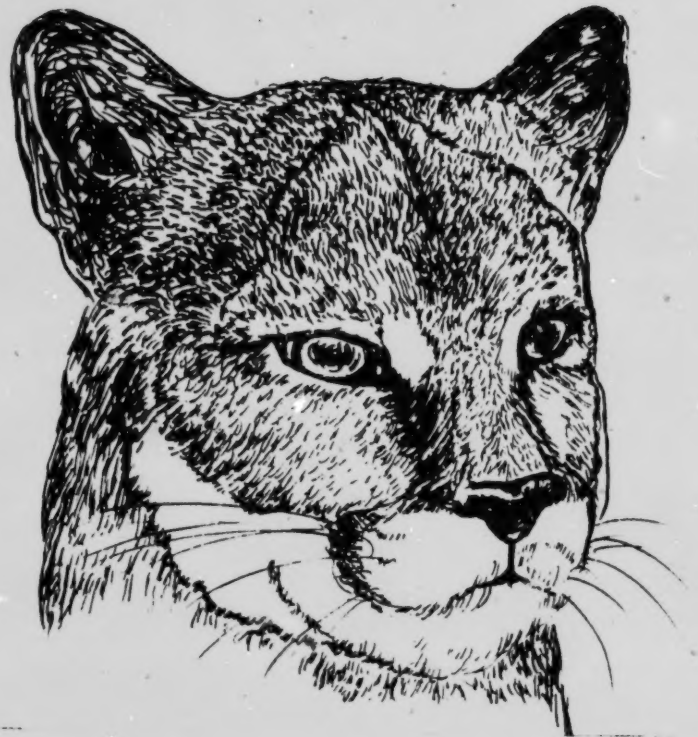
Hind Foot





Next to the Jaguar, we are the second largest cat in the Western Hemisphere. Imagine an ordinary house cat enlarged about twenty times and you'll have an idea of how big we are. A male panther's length is six to eight feet; the female a bit shorter. The weight of a male is about 170 pounds and a female is about 135 pounds.

Even though we are large we have great muscular strength and agility (quick easy movement). We are not long-distance runners but for short sprints we are one of the fastest animals in the world.



We would probably look like a brown blur to you. Our short, stiff fur may vary in color from pale brown to dark tawny or rusty brown. There are white areas around our upper lips, chin and throat. The back of our ears and muzzle are black. We are spotted only when we are young kittens. Then we are buff-colored with dark spots and ringed tails.

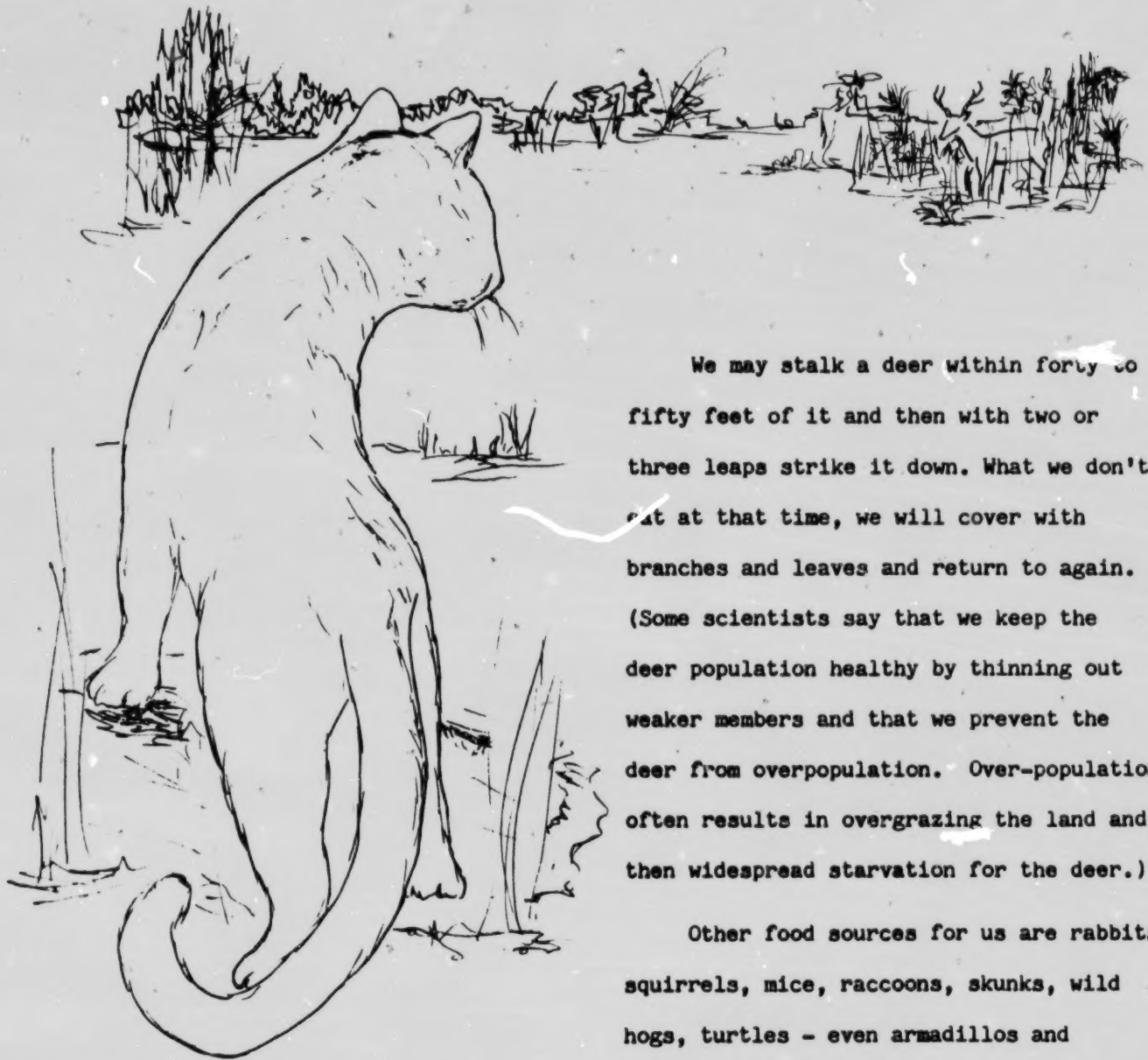
Females are about three years old before they breed. There is no fixed breeding season. Three months after mating, a litter of one to six kittens may be born, but usually only two. The den may be a thick patch of brush or located under fallen timber.



The male leaves after mating. But a mother panther is protective of her young. The cubs will stay with their mothers for nearly two years. By then they will be able to hunt for themselves and are about two-thirds their adult size.

During that time they will have learned: to tread silently on their padded feet, to travel many miles during the day and night, and to use their keen yellow eyes at dusk searching for their favorite food - deer. One of the main factors which determines whether we survive is the availability of a herd of deer.





We may stalk a deer within forty to fifty feet of it and then with two or three leaps strike it down. What we don't eat at that time, we will cover with branches and leaves and return to again. (Some scientists say that we keep the deer population healthy by thinning out weaker members and that we prevent the deer from overpopulation. Over-population often results in overgrazing the land and then widespread starvation for the deer.)

Other food sources for us are rabbits, squirrels, mice, raccoons, skunks, wild hogs, turtles - even armadillos and crocodile eggs. You might think that with such a varied diet along with our great skill as a hunter there would be an abundant number of Florida panthers. But that is not the way it is today.

In the wild we can protect ourselves from other animals. However, a hunter far more deadly than we, has put us in danger of extinction (end of a species).

And that is man with his guns, dogs and traps. Some experts say there are fewer than twenty of us left in Florida; while others estimate as many as two hundred of us exist. Because we are wary of man, we stay in remote regions. That makes it difficult for man to know exactly how many of us are still alive.



We have been protected from hunting in Florida since 1958, but that didn't stop all the poaching (illegal killing). Since then only one person has been sentenced to jail for thirty days and fined \$500 for killing one of our remaining members.

Now, however, the State of Florida has passed a law making it a felony to kill a panther. There is a maximum penalty of a \$5000 fine or five years in jail or both. Also, there is a \$10,000 fine for killing Florida Panthers provided by the Federal Endangered Species Act of 1973.

If enough of us survive, in the future there may be tales told by campers of seeing our shining eyes or hearing our haunting voices in the still of the night.





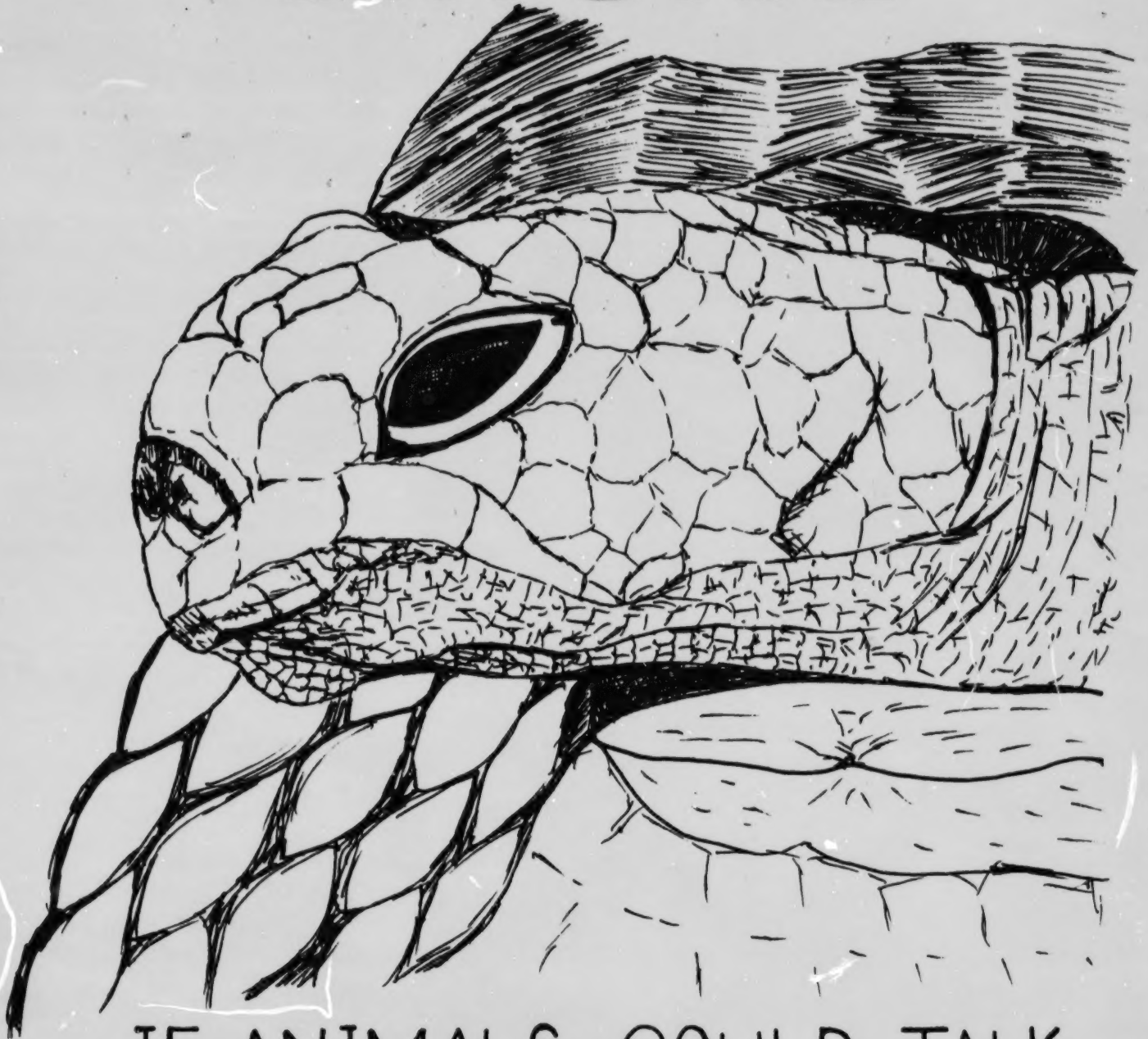
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# GOPHER TORTOISE



IF ANIMALS COULD TALK

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GOPHER TORTOISE

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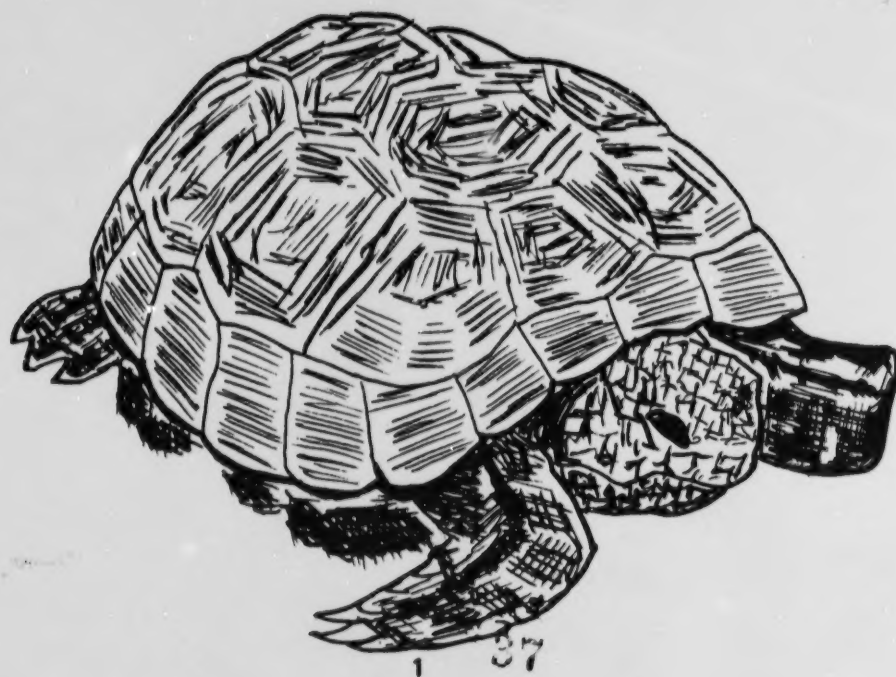
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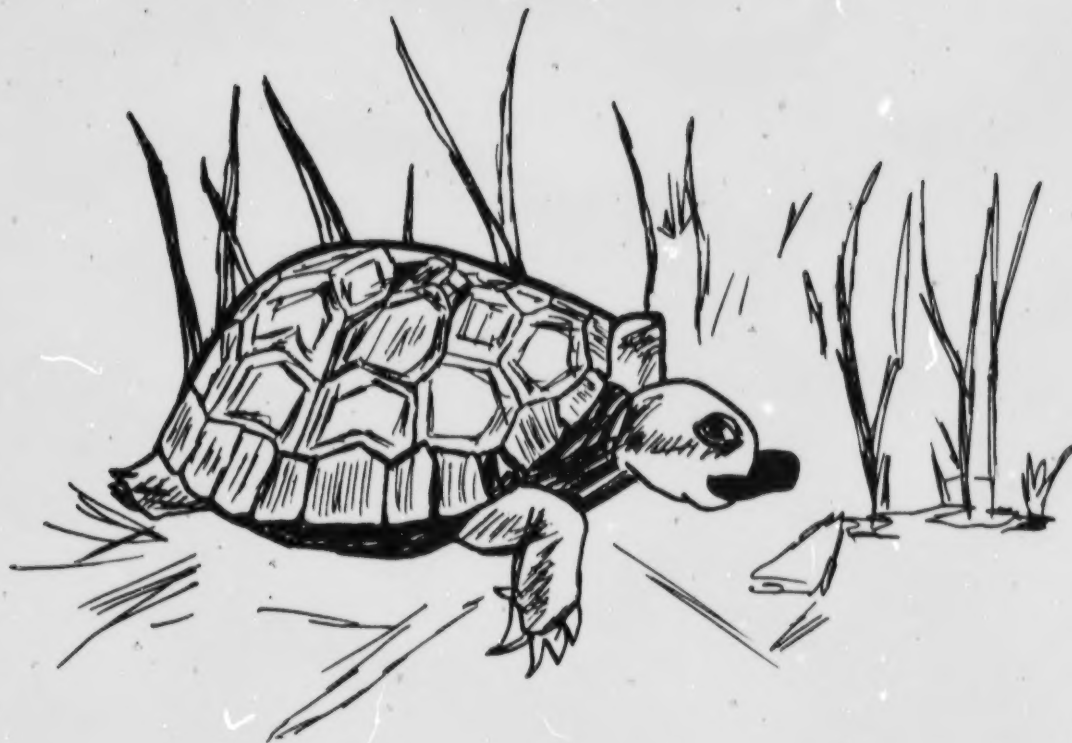
1979

IF GOPHER TORTOISES COULD TALK

You may call me Mr. Gopher. Here, here, a little respect! I am very old. I could be fifty years, or even a hundred years old. I have been around a long time. In fact, my kind have been around some 40 or 50 million years. Now that is a long time.



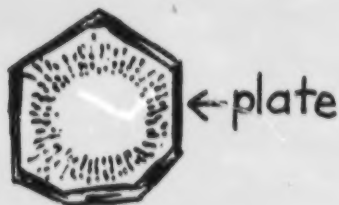
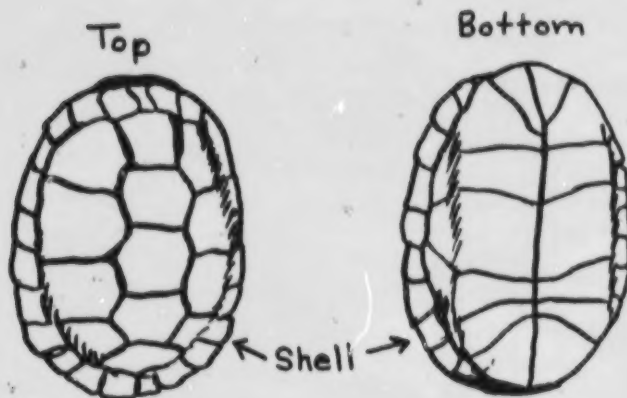




I could tell you some stories about times I have seen. Times when gopher tortoises lived a happy life. We always take it easy. What else can you do when you are not the fastest animal around.

I like to take life as it comes. I mind my business. I spend most of my time finding good things to eat. I feed on grasses, fallen leaves, and herbs. I really like pepper grass, wild onions, and wild mustard. Tasty! Tasty! Sometimes I eat wild fruits and berries. I even eat dead insects and animals that I find. My younger brothers and sisters especially do this.

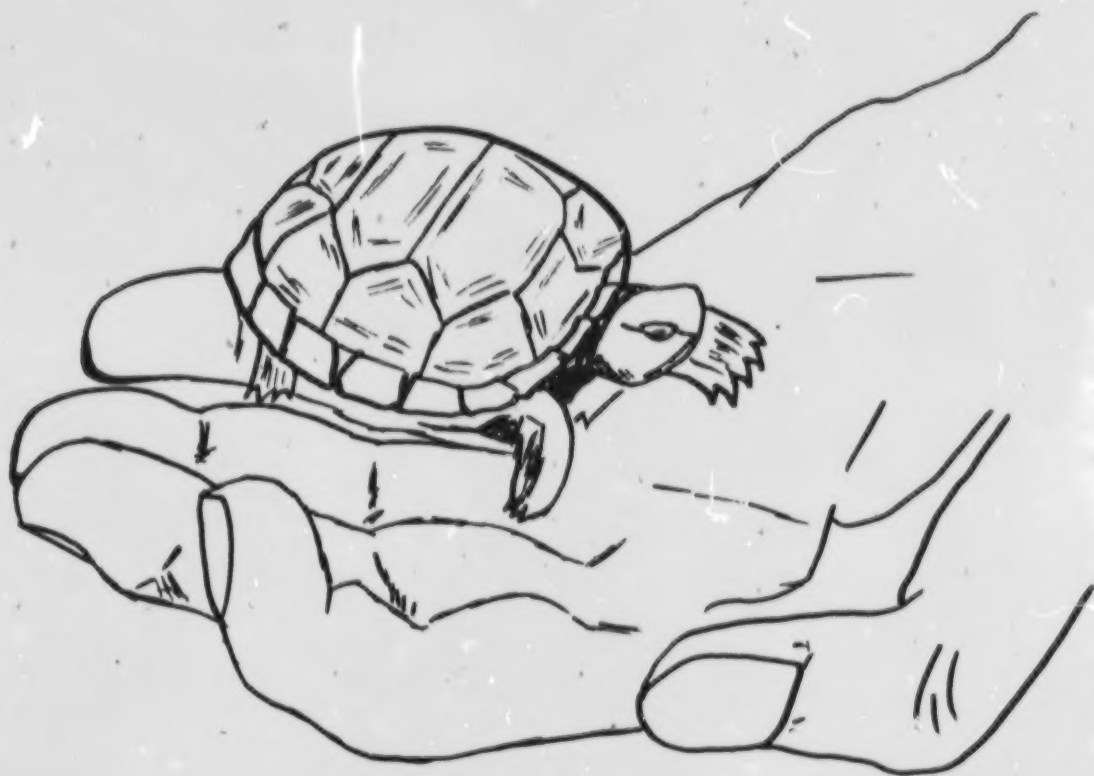




My younger brothers look a little bit different than I do. When gopher tortoises are young, they have yellow centers in the middle of their plates. You will see what a plate is, if you look at the picture on this page. As we get older, our shells become very smooth. The color of our upper shell becomes all brown or tan, while underneath we are all clear yellow.

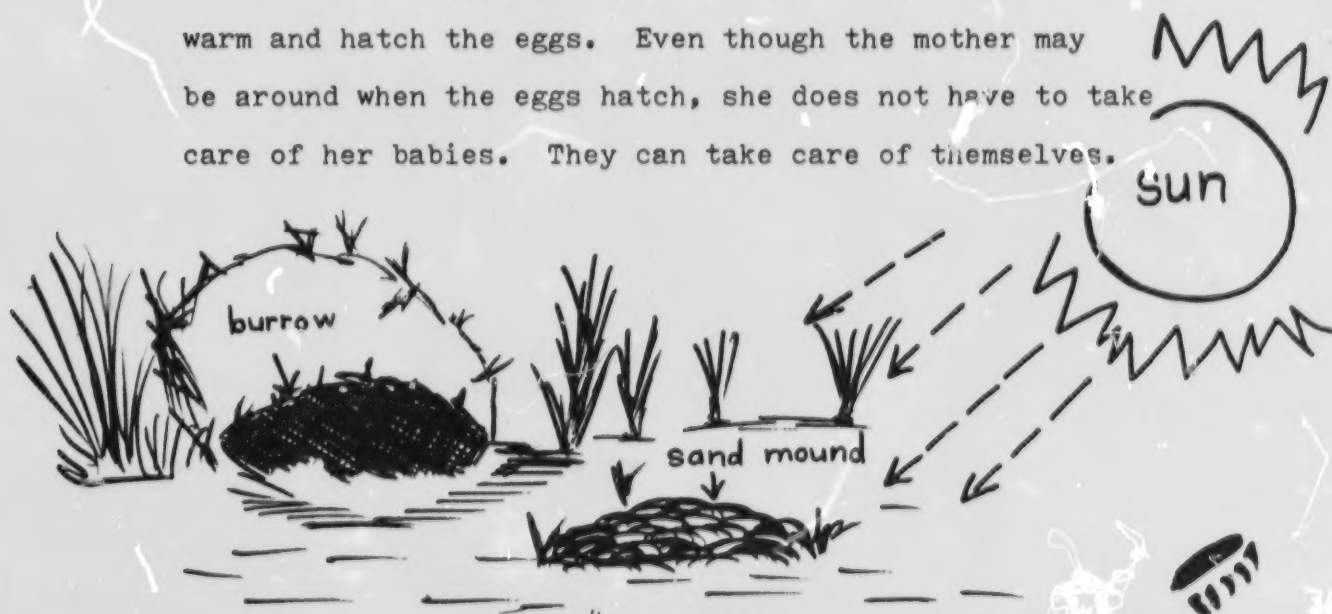
I have a wide head covered with scales and a very short tail. I must say my feet are the most important part of me. My front feet are flat and wide, just right for digging. My back feet are short and stubby.





Since I am older, I am about one foot in length, even though I was only an inch long when I hatched. I weigh about 10 to 12 pounds, but some unusually large gophers have been known to weigh as much as 20 pounds.

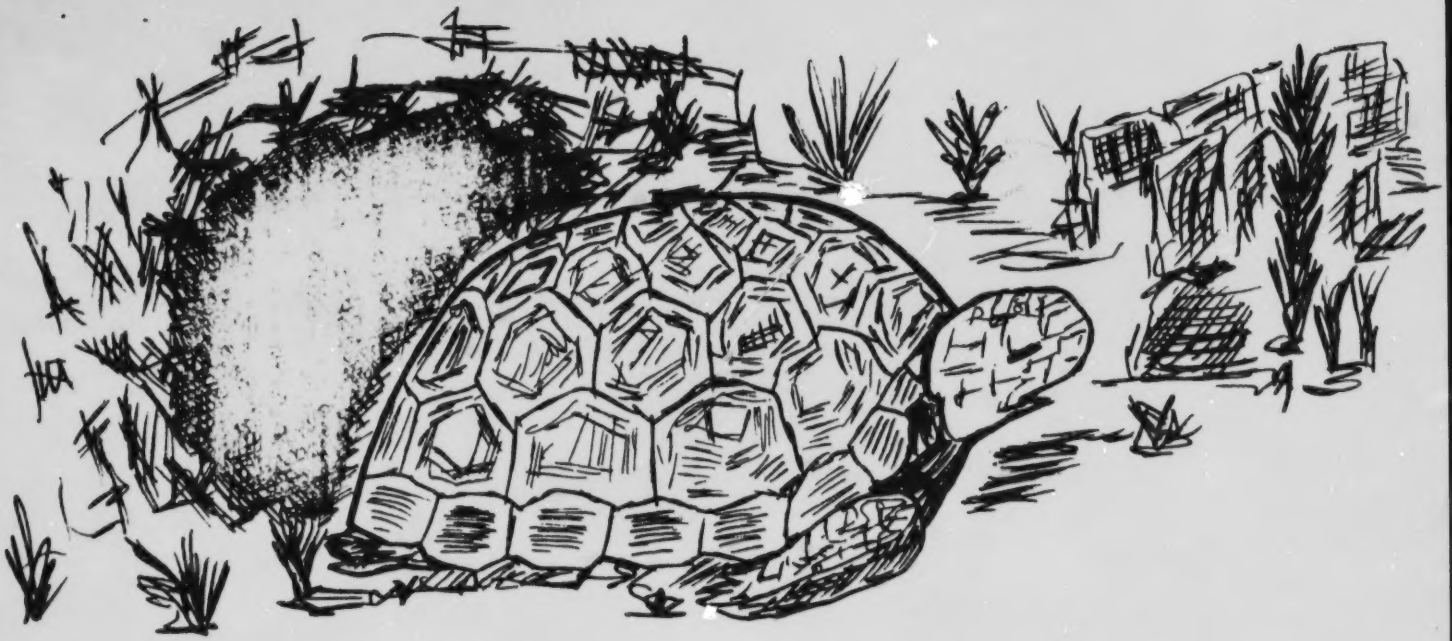
Mother gopher tortoises lay their eggs in a sand mound near their homes. The sun will keep the sand warm and hatch the eggs. Even though the mother may be around when the eggs hatch, she does not have to take care of her babies. They can take care of themselves.



The mother gopher  
tortoise may lay up to 15  
eggs, but not all of these  
will hatch. Other animals may  
eat the eggs. Even after the  
baby gophers hatch, they still  
may be eaten by other animals.  
I was lucky! I wasn't dinner  
for some one else and I have  
grown up fine and strong.





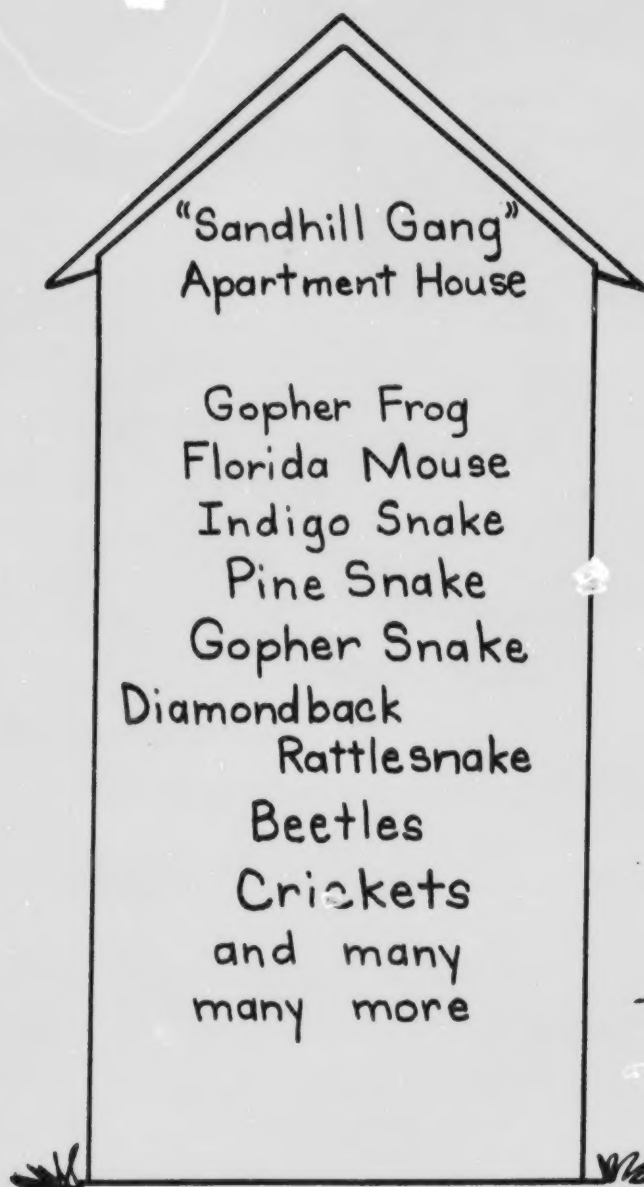


I am strong because I spend a good deal of my time digging. I dig what is called a burrow. I started digging when I was very young. Young gophers may start on a burrow that is small and belongs to another animal. I like digging so much I sometimes dig a burrow that is 30 feet long and 12 feet deep. My burrow is big enough for lots of animals to live there. You might say my burrow is like an apartment house.

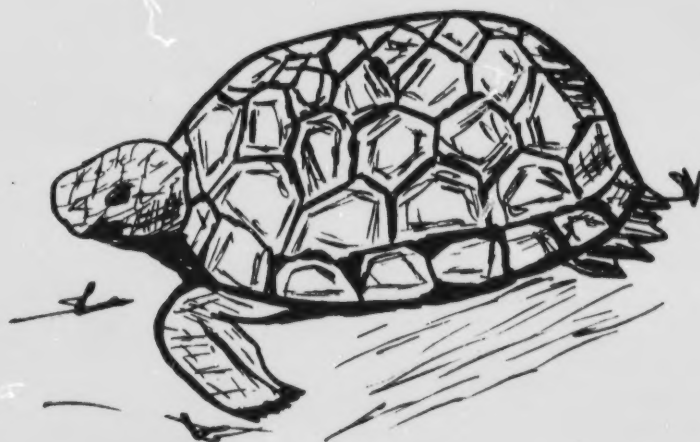


Sometimes people call the group of animals that live in my burrow the "sandhill gang". That is why my digging is so important. I provide a home for lots of animals. Some of them live there all the time, some are only there for a short time. You can check the list on this page for the names of the "sandhill gang".

Although my burrow may be the home for all or some of these animals, I live there too. Not only me but some of my brothers, sisters, or cousins may live in my burrow or in burrows nearby.



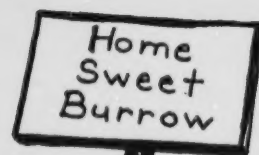
Landlord  
Gopher Tortoise

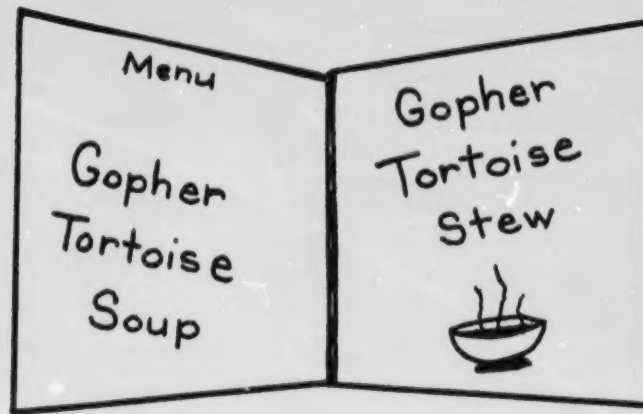


Gopher tortoises like to be near  
their burrows. We like a place to go  
when the weather gets chilly.  
As you may know, I am a reptile.

When it is cool outside then I am not very active.  
When the cool winds blow I dig down in my burrow to  
keep warm.

Ah! Life can be so good. I like to spend my time  
looking for food and digging. I like to live where the  
land is dry and sandy. Many of the places where I have  
lived in the past are now places where people live.  
It's gotten so I don't have many places to go! I don't  
mind land development for people---I just wish they  
would remember to leave some room for my family.





I have told you about some good times in my life. Now I will tell you about some of the bad times. I am on the menu for some people. For many years, gopher tortoises have been caught for food. There were times in the past when we were important to people who didn't have other food to eat. But in those days there were more gopher tortoises. Now we are not so many. But still people catch us for food.

Even though the law says people can hunt gophers for themselves, they are not allowed to sell us. Many people still hunt and sell gophers for money. This is against the law.



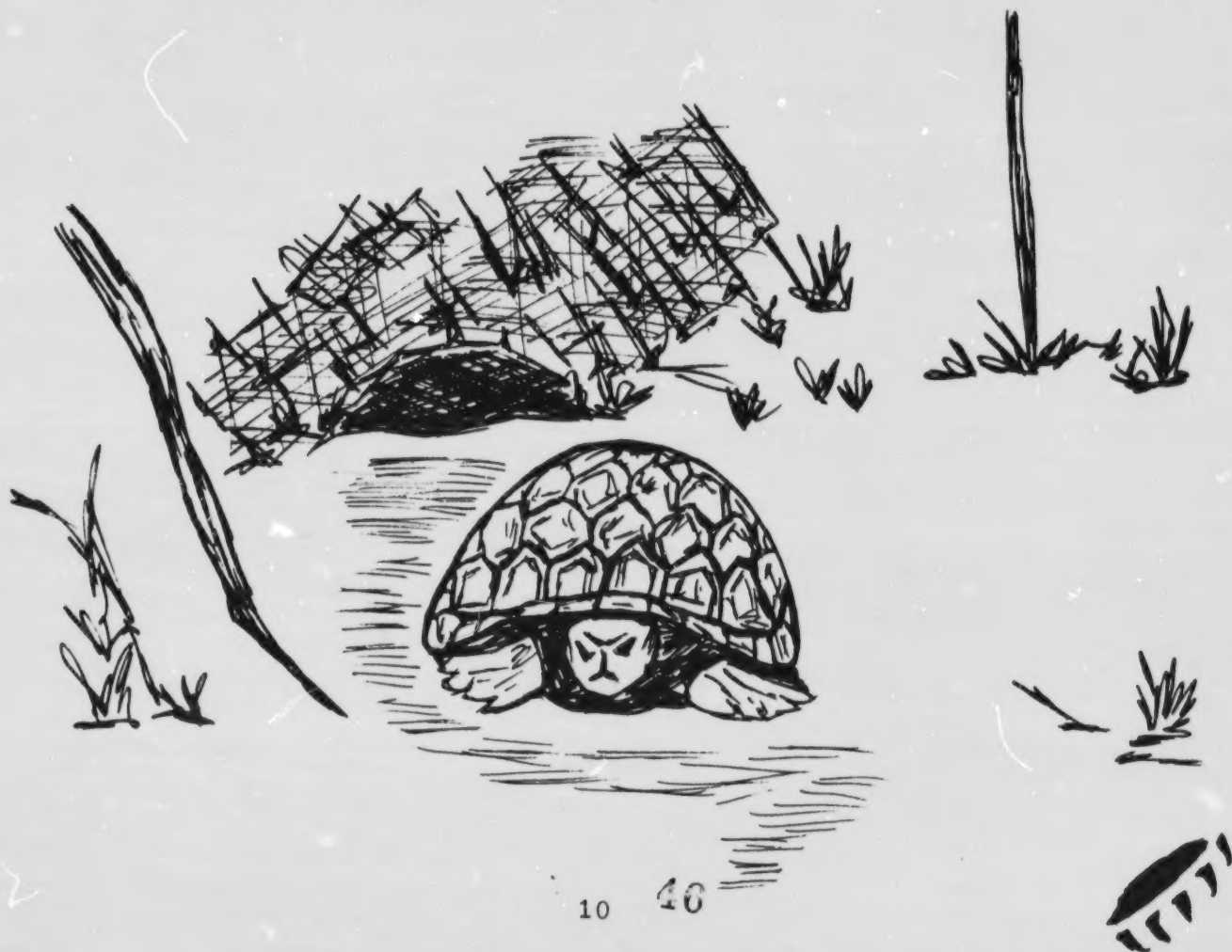


Some people believe old folk tales that say gophers are good for them to eat. Some people still hunt, sell, and eat gopher tortoises. I do not want to become stew or soup!



I hope you will want to help protect gophers. Gophers have been around for a long time, and we want to be around for a lot longer. We need to have the help of people to protect us, and protect a place where we can grow old gracefully.

I want to dig, and eat, and take life as it comes. I may be even a hundred years old. I could live to be older, if everyone would help.



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1978-79

PINELLAS Co.

# INDIGO SNAKE



IF ANIMALS COULD TALK

**INDIGO SNAKE**

**ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

Funds for the original production of this booklet were provided by the Florida State Department of Education Environmental Education Mini-Grant Program.

The School Board of Pinellas County, Florida

Dr. Gus Sakkis  
Superintendent of Schools

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Anderson Environmental Education Center - Sawgrass Lake

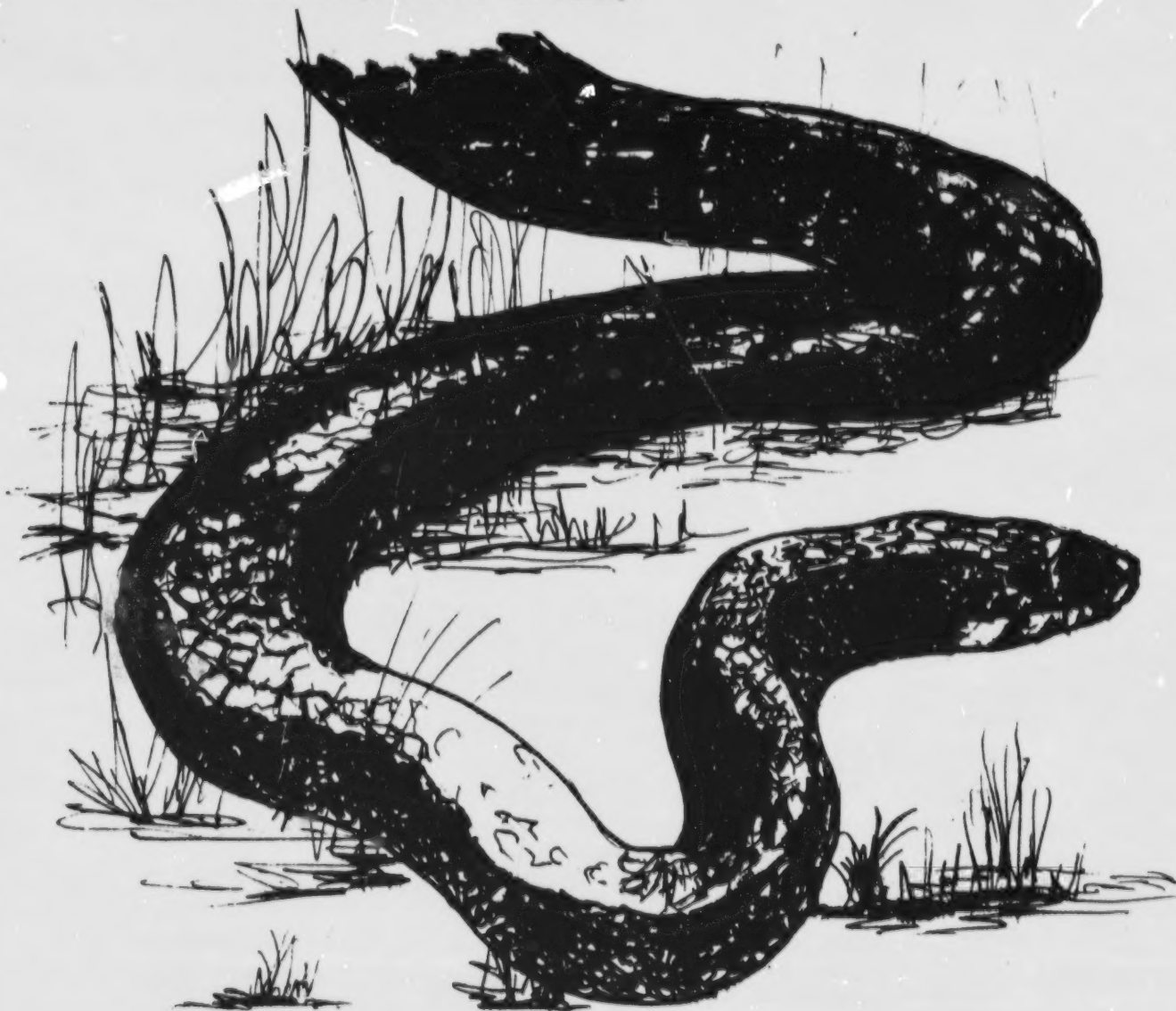
1979

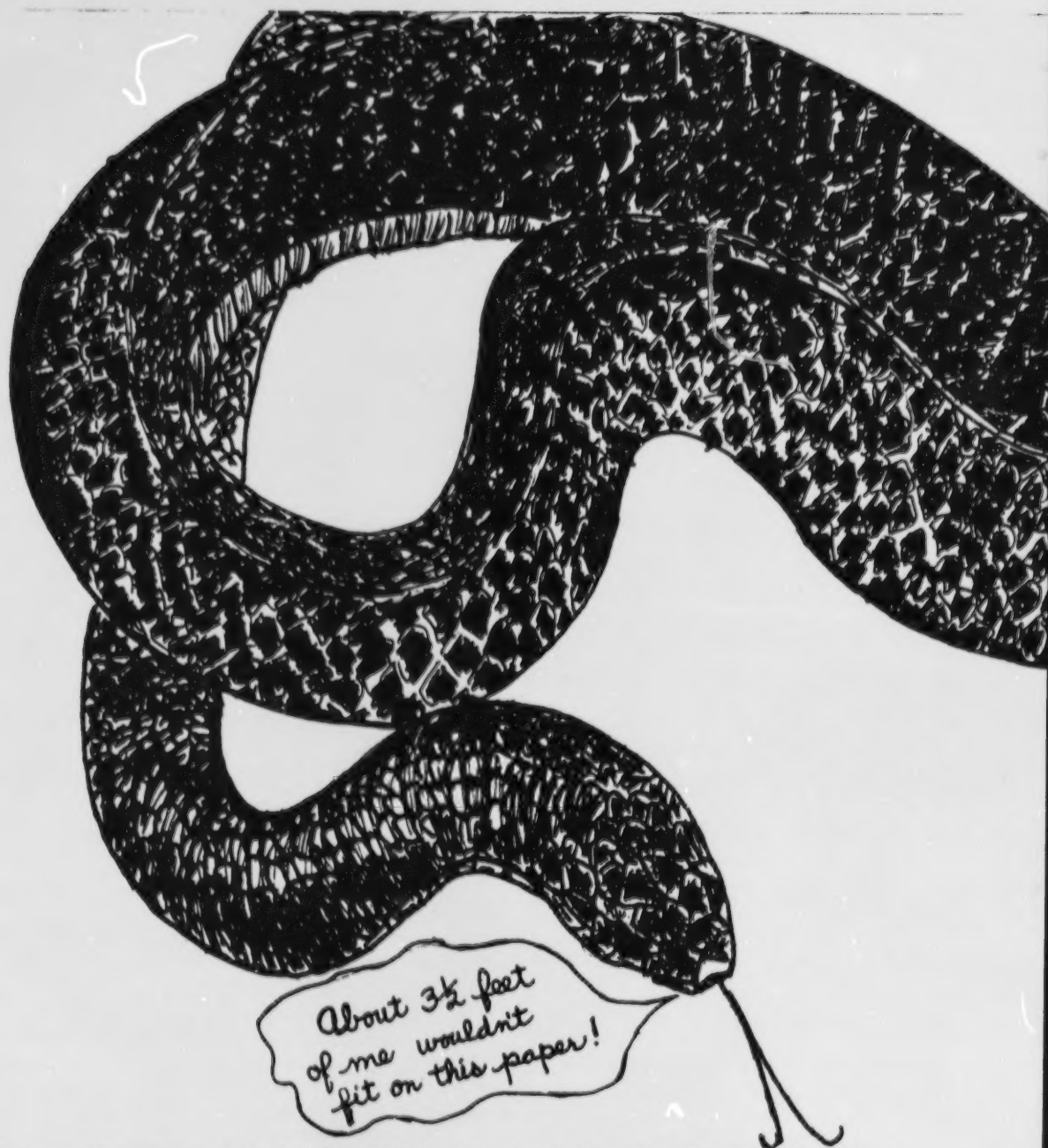


## IF EASTERN INDIGO SNAKES COULD TALK

Hi, y'all! I'm probably the friendliest endangered animal that you can find. That's a major part of our problem. Because we are not only gentle and easy to tame but a beautiful, big harmless snake, we have been much in demand as pets for people

Who wouldn't admire our glossy, smooth-scaled skin with hues of dark blue-violet to inky black accented with tinges of rosy orange around our lips, chin and throat? Glassy, yellow eyes covered with a transparent membrane and a forked tongue add to our beauty.





Picture this on a robust, flexible body about five to six feet long and you can easily understand why snake fanciers have enjoyed having us as pets. Entertainers have used us as part of their acts and farmers have kept us to control their rodent problems or to keep rattlesnakes away. If a rattlesnake should bite us, it won't feel good but it will not poison us like it will you.

For many years collectors have removed us from the wild, so now only a few of us remain in our native habitat.

We like sandy palmetto covered hills, high pinelands or tropical hammocks for our living area. But don't be surprised if you should happen to see us around swampland. We need to drink often and to take care that there is water available for us because we are apt to lose moisture from our body quickly.



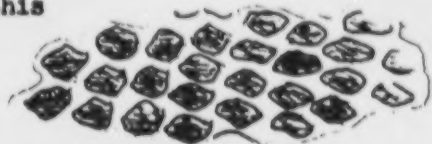
That's one reason you might find us in a Gopher Tortoise's burrow. Or you might find us there dining on tortoise eggs. If there are Gopher Tortoises in an area, you can be sure we'll be there, too.



Much of our life is spent underground. We're most active during the morning hours looking around for our favorite prey - rats, mice, gophers, rabbits or birds. Or we may forage in the water for fish or frogs. We'll even eat other snakes, including rattlesnakes. Our manners are not good, as we swallow our food whole-head first, at that.

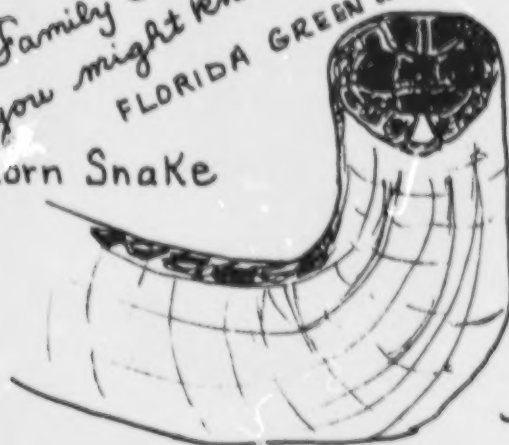


I'm sure most of you know that as we grow we shed our skin. When we're adults we shed but not as much as during our growth period. When we shed, our body becomes duller looking and our eyes become cloudy. Then we'll start rubbing our head against a branch or rock and loosen the dead skin. Gradually we'll work out of it and as we move out, the dead skin will be inside out. You may find pieces of our shed skin looking like this or nearly the complete skin.





A few of the  
Family Colubridae  
you might know are:  
FLORIDA GREEN WATER  
SNAKE  
Corn Snake



Florida Kingsnake  
Southern Hognose Snake  
PINE WOODS SNAKE  
Eastern Hater Snake  
FLORIDA BROWN SNAKE  
Yellow Rat Racer  
Brown Water Snake  
Florida Water Snake  
Peninsula Ribbon Snake  
Southern Black Racer

Indigo snakes are neither poisonous nor constrictors. Our Family Colubridae contains over half of the existing snakes in the world. Within our family we are the largest snake in the United States. Basically, we are tropical snakes. We range throughout the southeastern United States but mainly we're found in peninsular Florida and southeastern Georgia. Most people call us: Gopher Snake, Blue Gopher or Blue Bullsnake. Actually, our proper name is Drymarchon corais couperi

We start life off as an egg. The white egg shells are like sandpaper and the egg is about the size of a large chicken egg. Usually five to twelve eggs are laid from April to June. They are laid in or under logs, under piles of leaves or grass or in Gopher burrows.

They hatch in July or August. The young snakes will to 19 to 24 inches long and marked with a light speckling on a dark background.



We do have some enemies - pigs and men. In one way man likes us so much that he has caused us to be an endangered species in Florida by overcollecting us.

In another way he is taking our land and destroying us while he is gassing rattlesnakes in the Gopher Tortoise burrows. He not only kills the rattlesnakes, he kills us, too!

It was helpful to us when the State of Florida passed a law in 1971 to prohibit collecting and selling us. Of course, that didn't stop smugglers from catching us and selling us out of state. The federal park or refuge program needs to be expanded to include some of our sandhill habitats.

Our problem is we like the same kind of land to live on that you want for your homes and towns. But you don't hear us when we say, "Hey, let us keep some of this land. The Eastern Indigo Snake and all the Endangered Species in Florida want to stay around for awhile, too!"



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# MANATEE

1978-79

P. BELLAS CO.



IF ANIMALS COULD TALK

NM



MANATEE

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Funds for the original production of this booklet were provided by the Florida State Department of Education Environmental Education Mini-Grant Program.

The School Board of Pinellas County, Florida

Dr. Gus Sakkis  
Superintendent of Schools

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Division of Curriculum and Instruction

Anderson Environmental Education Center - Sawgrass Lake

1979

## IF MANATEES COULD TALK

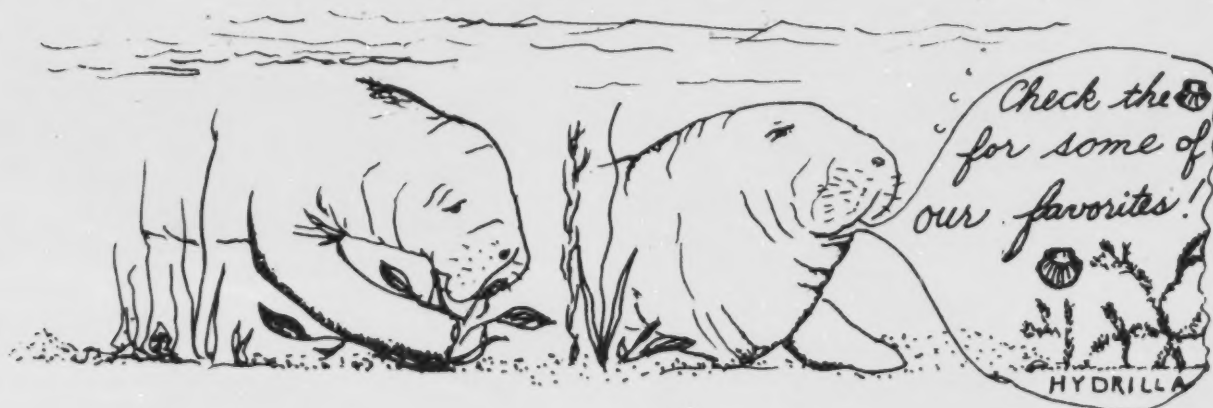


If we could talk, we wouldn't say much. We're normally silent but occasionally we will let out a squeal or a chirp or even a scream if a mother thinks her calf is in danger. You would say, "What a high pitched voice!"

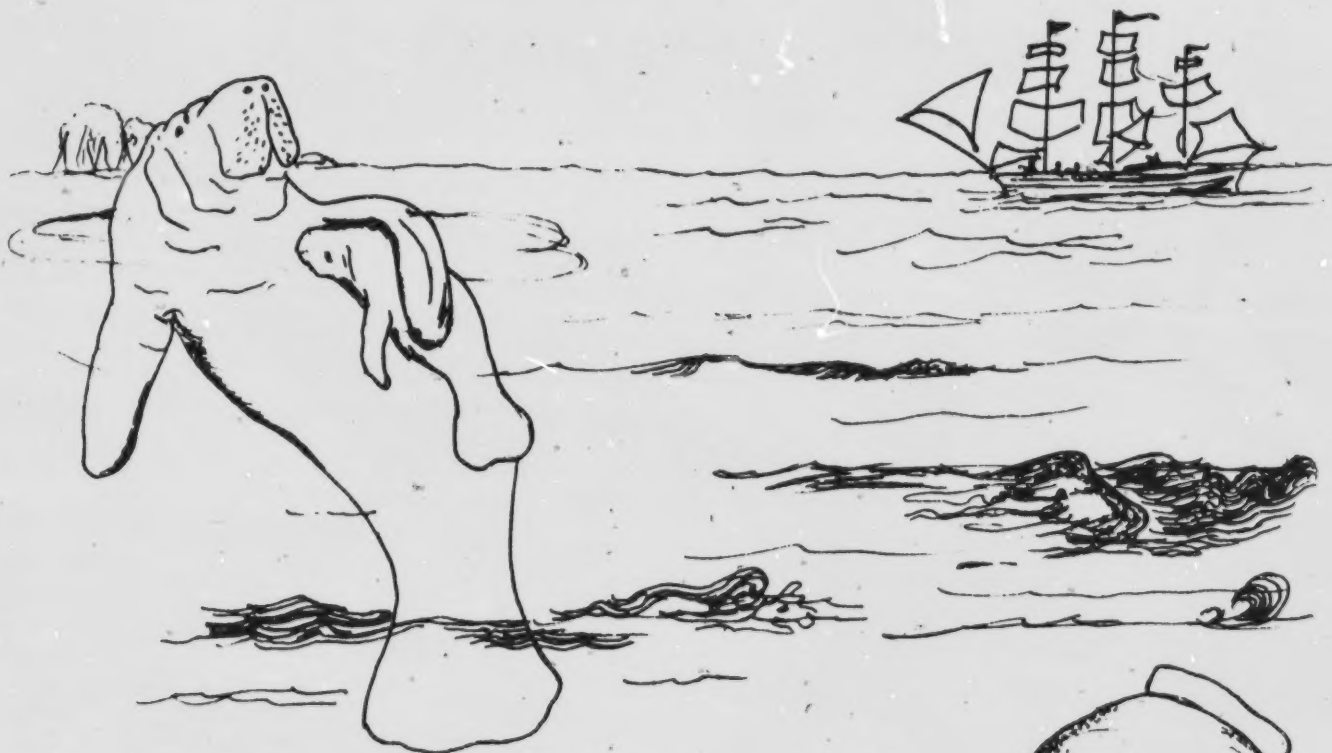
At heart, we're rather shy and enjoy being left alone. Oh, at times, we get together in large groups but that's usually because we're moving to warm water or good feeding grounds with lots of underwater plants.

We don't stake out any territory for ourselves—we just go where the living is easy. Indeed, most of the day and night we spend feeding and resting.

We are the only existing herbivorous - (plant eater only) marine mammal. Our favorite foods are submerged plants - Pistia, Hydrilla, Elodea. You name it, if it grows in the water we will eat it. Because we eat water hyacinths, which are a pest to you, man has tried to have us help him rid some of his canals and streams of the hyacinths; however, unless the water is deep enough that doesn't work.

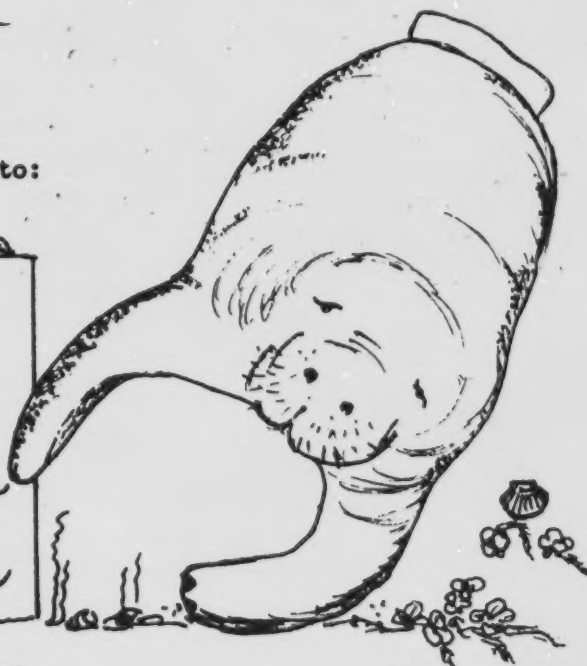


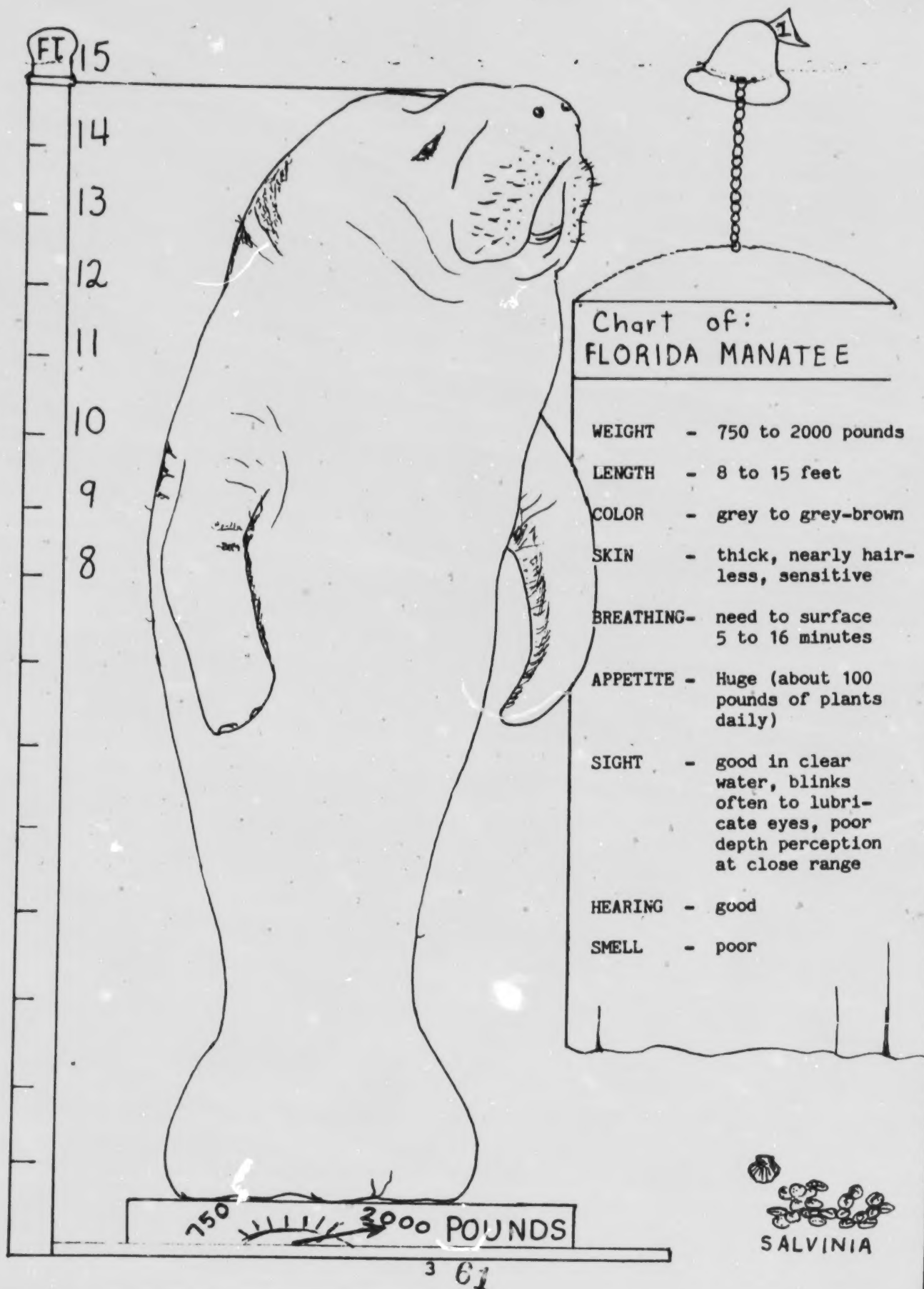
Now, to introduce ourselves. Our formal name is the Florida or West Indian Manatee. Today some people call us Sea Cows but a long time ago sailors mistook us as mermaids. (With our lovely face and form, that's only natural!)



We have been scientifically grouped into:

KINGDOM - *Animal*  
PHYLUM - *Cordata*  
CLASS - *Mammalia*  
ORDER - *Sirenia*  
FAMILY - *Trichechidae*  
GENUS - *Trichechus*  
SPECIES - *manatus*







Our relationship with man has been hard on us. In the 1700's and 1800's we were killed in great numbers for our meat, oil and leather. Since our reproductive rate is low, we faced extinction (end of a species) early. Usually a manatee bears only one calf every 2 or 3 years and it takes 6 to 8 years for the calf to reach maturity.



Florida passed a law in 1907 making it illegal to kill manatees. But man continued to kill us for food during the Depression and early World War II years.

Furthermore, we became legally protected by the following two acts:

The Federal Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972

The Endangered Species Act of 1973

There are fines of up to \$500 for molesting or poaching us. Even at that, there are only about 1,000 of us remaining.



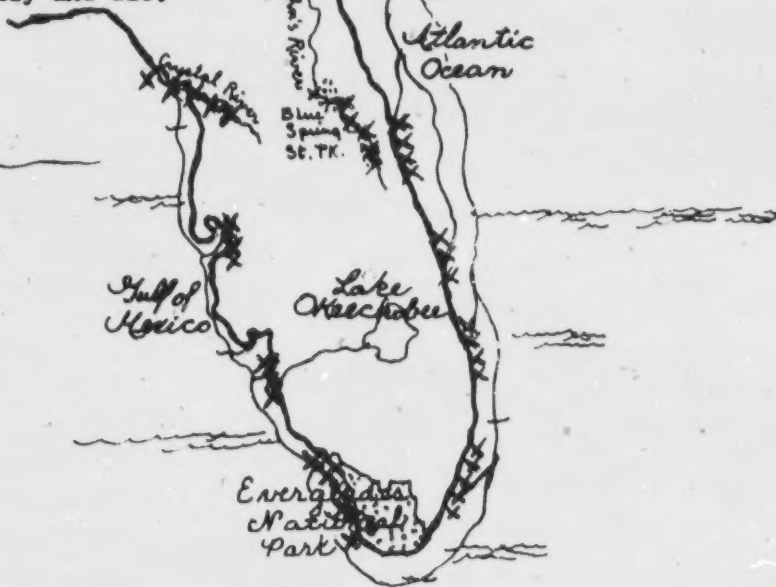
WATER-HYACINTH



Start at the arrow and find the way to our wintering areas. Florida has named these as protected areas for us.

During warm weather, some of us may range as far north as the North Carolina coast or around the Gulf Coast to Texas. As soon as the water starts getting cold, we head for Florida.

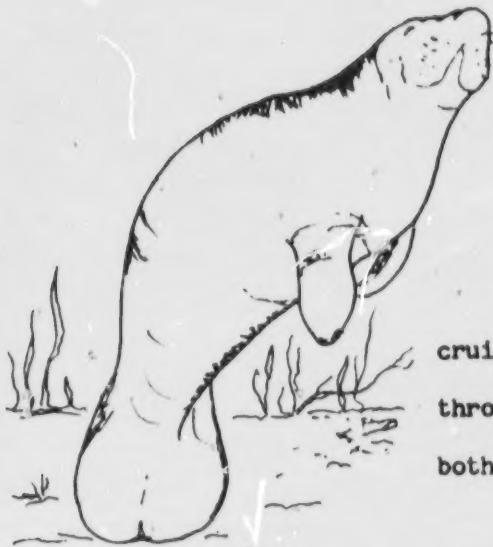
If the temperature of the water is 65° or less for any length of time, we may develop bronchial pneumonia or pleurisy and die.



So we spend our winters- usually from November to April - in the warm waters along the Florida coast. Our favorite areas are the quiet rivers, estuaries, (wide mouths of rivers) shallow bays, warm springs and power plant discharge outlets.



SOUTHERN  
NAIAD



Lucky for us, we can live in salt, brackish (somewhat salty) or fresh water. We like fresh water to drink and we are usually only in salt water when we migrate.

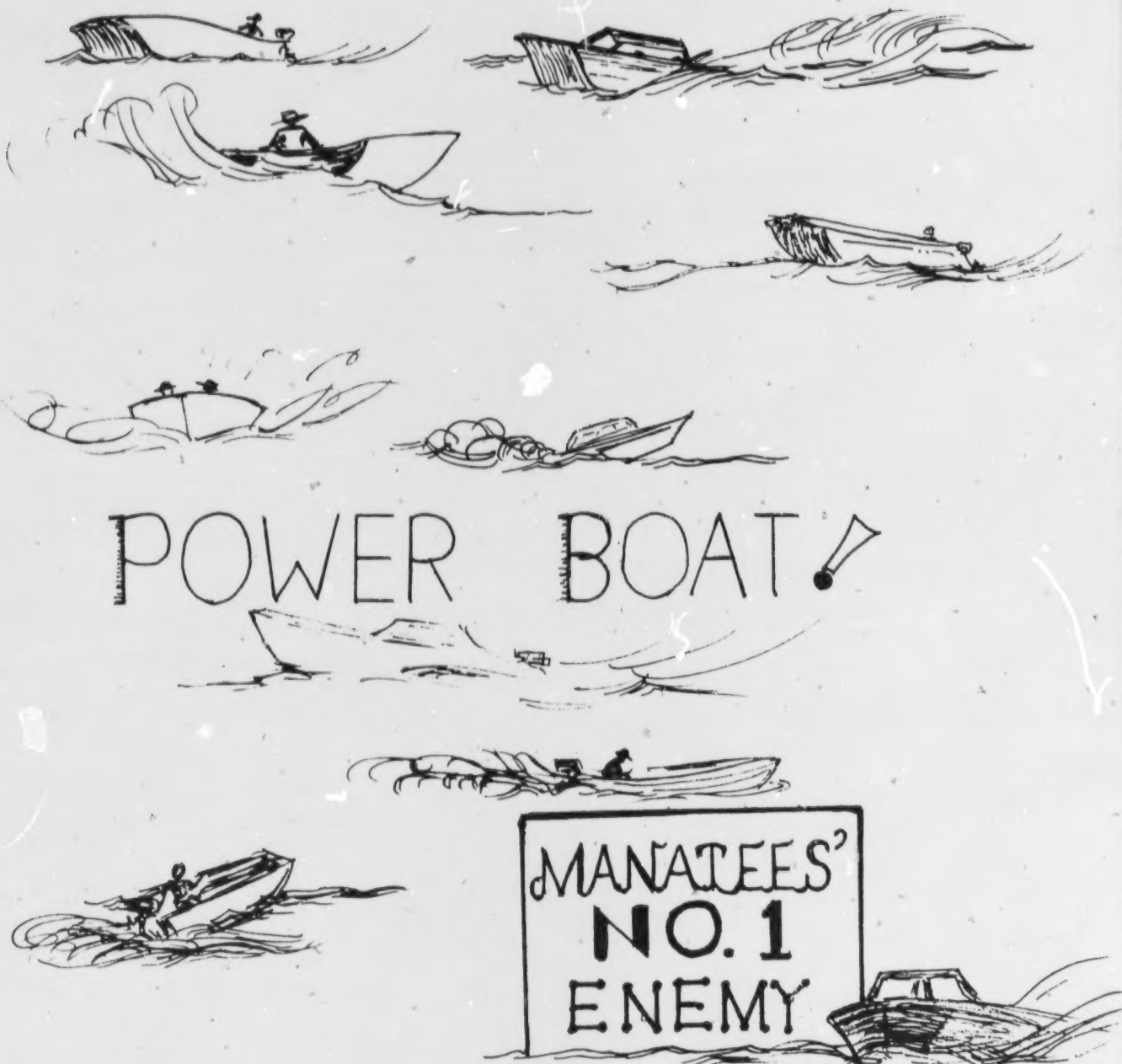
We'll go up rivers as far as the depths will allow cruising at depths of 1 to 3 meters. Sometimes we pass through schools of fish, tarpon and sharks. They don't bother us and we don't pay any attention to them.

Of course, we have to be careful where we swim. Sometimes we may be landlocked in a canal or find our bottom-growing plants covered with silt from dredging or discover the water is too polluted for us.



We have to take care that we don't get into narrow channels where we can't get away from our number one enemy - the ...





# POWER BOAT!

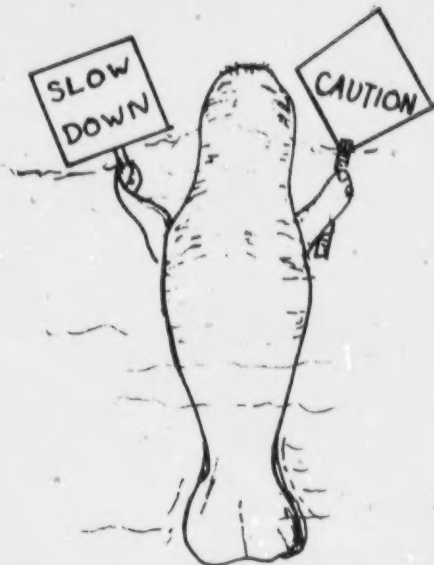
MANATEES'  
NO. 1  
ENEMY

Many of us bear the scars of cutting propellers or slashing boat keels.  
In 1978, more than 100 of us were injured or killed by high speed motorboats.  
We try to get out of their way but we're so big that we can't move fast  
enough to avoid the boats.





Here's how you can help us build up our population. Whenever you're in a boat in one of our sanctuaries (protected by law), make sure to slow down and proceed with caution.



Look around you for bubbles on the water or for churned up mud. You might see a manatee's nose, or head or tail.



We would like to be your friend. We're curious to know more about you. If you're scuba diving, we would even like you to scratch our back.

Any time you sight one of us, you can help us by reporting your observations to:

Manatee Survey  
National Fish and Wildlife Laboratory  
2820 E. University Ave.  
Gainesville, Florida 32601  
(Phone: 904-372-2571)

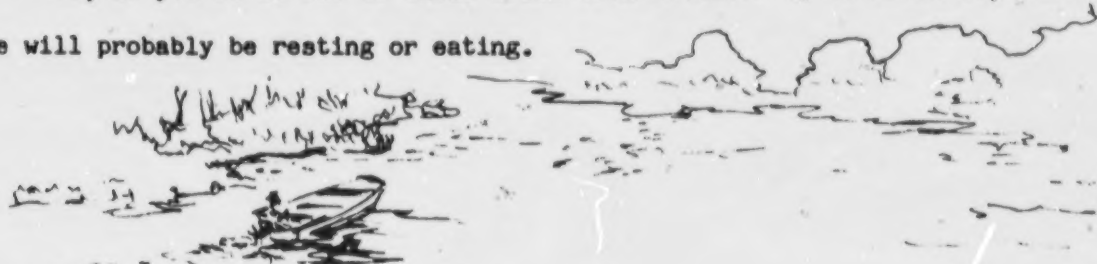
Or there is a toll-free, 24 hour telephone system ( Phone 800-342-1821) that you can call to report any manatee sightings, boat collisions or violations of our well-being.



We want to thank the state of Florida for passing the Florida Manatee Sanctuary Act in 1978. It established slow speed zones where we congregate (gather) during cold weather.



So, if you're in one of these areas from November 15 to March 31, remember we will probably be resting or eating.



Beware and take care!

MANATEE  
REFUGE

IDLE  
SPEED  
NO WAKE



WIDGEON GRASS

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1978-79

P. INGALLS Co.

# OTTER



IF ANIMALS COULD TALK



OTTER

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Funds for the original production of this booklet were provided by the Florida State Department of Education Environmental Education Mini-Grant Program.

Written and illustrated  
by  
Abbielynn Martin

The School Board of Pinellas County, Florida

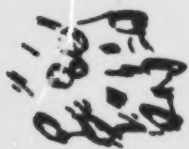
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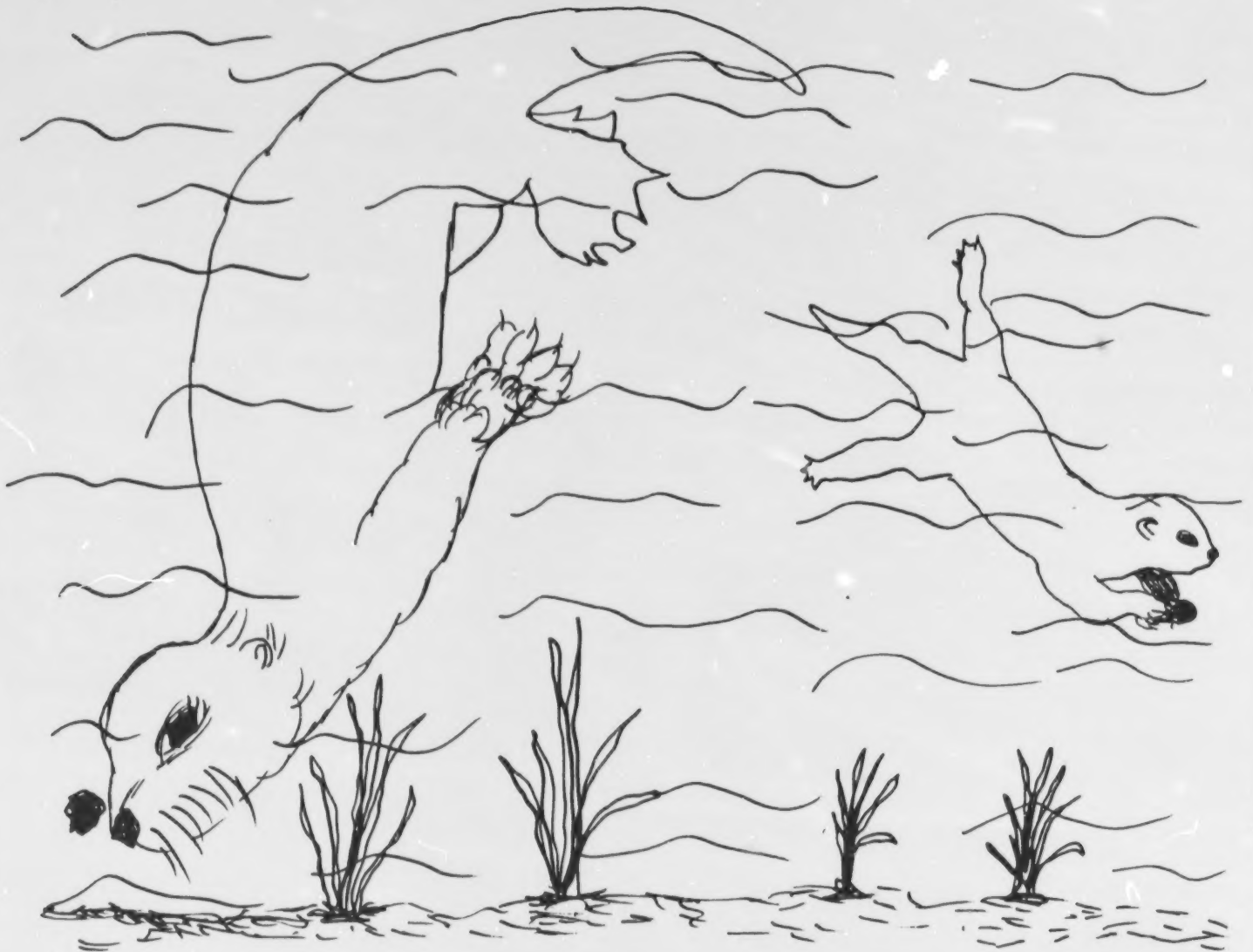
1979

# IF OTTERS COULD TALK



Wheeee!!! Come on! Let's slide! I love to slide down the mud on the bank by the river. My wet body helps keep the mud slippery. Sometimes, if I slow down, I give myself a push with my hind-feet. Come on! Follow me! Let's do it again. Just tuck your front feet beside you and down you go. Splash!! It's fun to make a big splash in the water. If I lived up north, I'd slide on the snow.





Hello! Otter is my name, fun is my game. I like to make a game out of everything I do.

Even grown-up otters play games. We like to chase each other playing tag. We can juggle stones in the water. I can even throw a stone into the water and catch it on my nose or in my mouth before it hits the bottom.

Sometimes I even play pranks on my river neighbors. My cousin the beaver does not think it's funny when I pull his tail. He is busy working all the time.



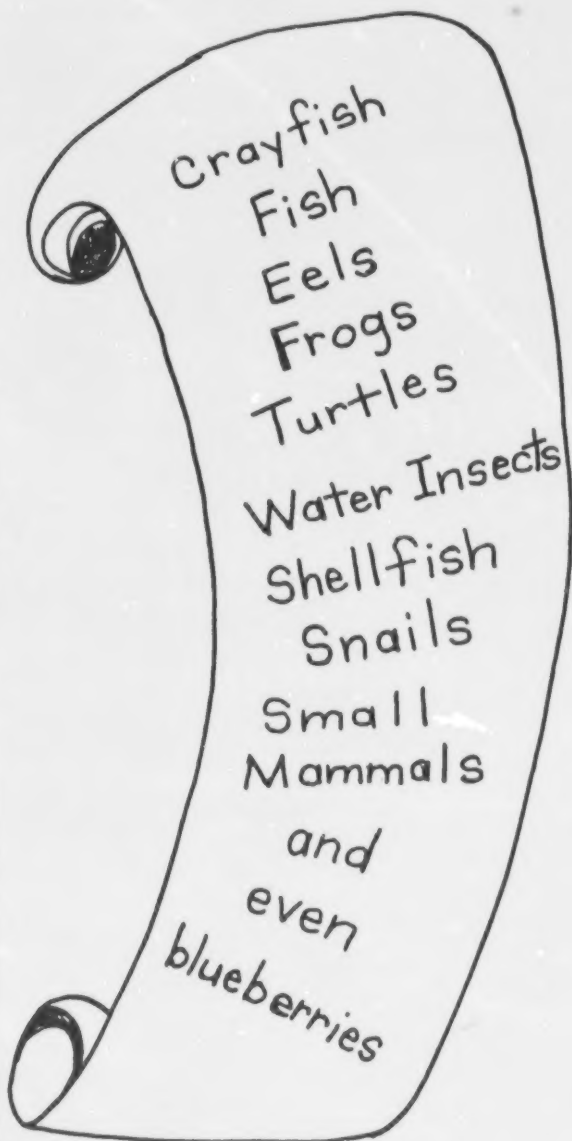
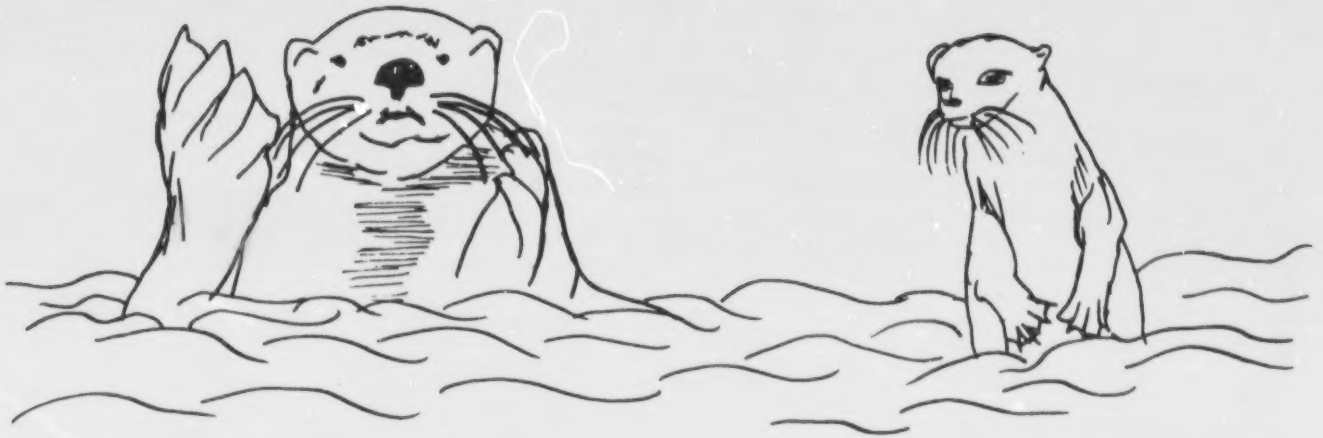


It is true, I like to play most of the time. I even make a game of eating. It is very easy for me to catch my dinner. I guess that is one reason I have so much time for playing.

When I have caught my food, I make my own table. I float on my back and use my front as my table. Sometimes I bring my dinner on shore and use a rock as my table.







I like to eat many different things as you can see by reading the list on this page. My favorite food is crayfish. Of course, I like fish, too. That is one reason fishermen do not like me. They say I eat all the fish that they want to catch. In some places, men killed all the otters because of this belief.

Scientists have proven that this belief is not true. They say I am an important part of nature. I do the job of a predator. That means I am part of a food chain. Besides, if you give me a choice, I will pick a crayfish over a trout any day.



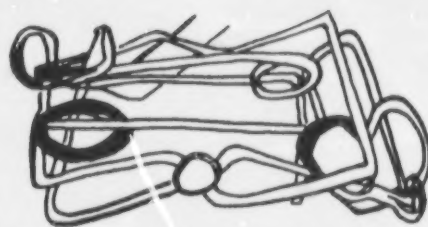


Even though I am playful and curious, I am shy when it comes to meeting people. I like to hide and watch, but I don't like to be seen. I may live near people and they may never see me.

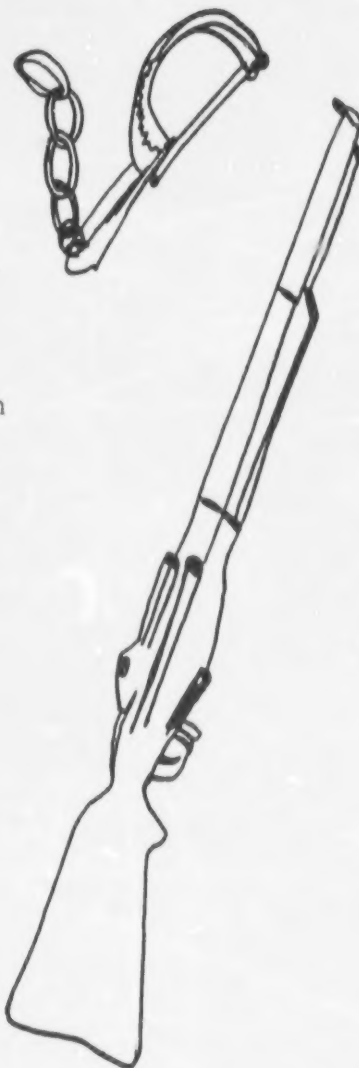
If you are looking for an otter, you should look for a small head with bright shiny eyes peering out of the water. My body is long and slender. Sometimes I am dark brown, sometimes I am yellowish-brown. I have a thick powerful tail which I use for swimming in the water. I use it on land to help me stand on my hind legs. My feet are webbed. My claws are sharp, good for digging and holding my dinner.



I have special things about my body that make me such a good swimmer. When I dive underwater, both my ears and my nose close up. My heart beats slower, too. That way I can stay underwater for up to four minutes.

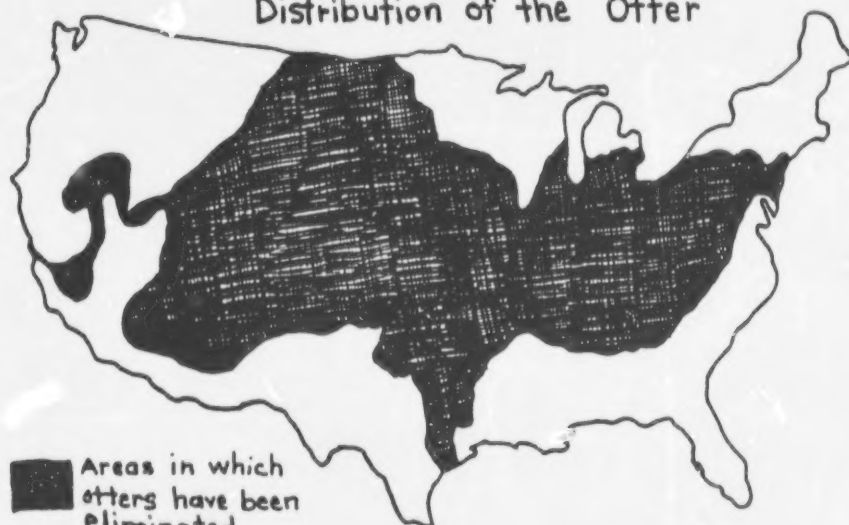


I guess my fur is the most important thing about me to man. That is why he hunts and traps me. I have to be very careful. I must be on the lookout for traps all the time. Man has been an enemy that I can not fight. I can not fight guns, traps, and water pollution. Many places where I use to live are now places where man lives.



I use to live in almost all the states. When man first crossed the country, I was everywhere. I watched the pioneers go west. But now, there are not many places where I can live my carefree life.

Distribution of the Otter



-  Areas in which otters have been eliminated.
-  Areas in which otters are still found.



Some people have tried to protect me. For that, I thank them very much. I hope you want to help protect me, too! Laws have been made that say man can not use traps to catch me. But still there are traps. Still there are people who pay alot of money for my fur.

The fact that my fur is very rich and glossy-looking, and that it is very thick and soft to touch, has made it very valuable. I hope soon people will decide that I am important just as I am.

I hope people will want to help protect where I live, too. I like to live along the rivers. I need a place to make my home. A mother otter will look for a den in which to have her pups. She might use a deserted beaver house, or any other covered area near the water. The mother otter has to be at least two years old. She may wait to have her pups until conditions are just right.





When otter pups are born they are very small and dark brown. Sometimes there are two to five pups. They drink the mother's milk and grow strong and playful.

When they are about four or five months old, the mother otter will take her pups out of the den. She and the father otter will help the pups learn to swim and look for food. Soon the whole family will be playing hide-and-seek and follow-the-leader. The family will play together until the pups are grown.

Sometimes the father otters go off wandering on their own. Some otters cover as much as a fifty mile area in a year. All otters are too busy playing and swimming to sleep during the winter like some of their cousins. Besides, we all like our food fresh every day.



Just as I love to play, all otters play throughout their life. I have known some otters that lived as long as 15 to 20 years. And even though I thought they were too old, they just kept right on playing.

I will go on playing till I am old, if man will help me. If he will protect the places where I live and not buy my fur, I might live to be an old, playful otter too.

Come on! We still have time for another slide down the mud bank. Let's hurry! I bet I can slide faster than you. Come on! Splash!



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1978-79  
Penguins Co.

# RACCOON



IF ANIMALS COULD TALK



RACCOON

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Written and illustrated  
by  
Abbielynn Martin

The School Board of Pinellas County, Florida

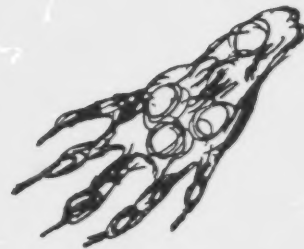
Dr. Gus Sakkin  
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Division of Curriculum and Instruction

Anderson Environmental Education Center - Sawgrass Lake

1979

IF RACCOONS COULD TALK



Shhh!!! My babies are sleeping. I am a mother raccoon. I live in a hollow tree near the river. I have lived in this tree for about five years. I have had other litters of babies and they have grown up and gone on their way. One year I had two babies, another year, I had six. This year I have four baby raccoons. They are about two months old now, and soon they will learn to hunt for their own food.

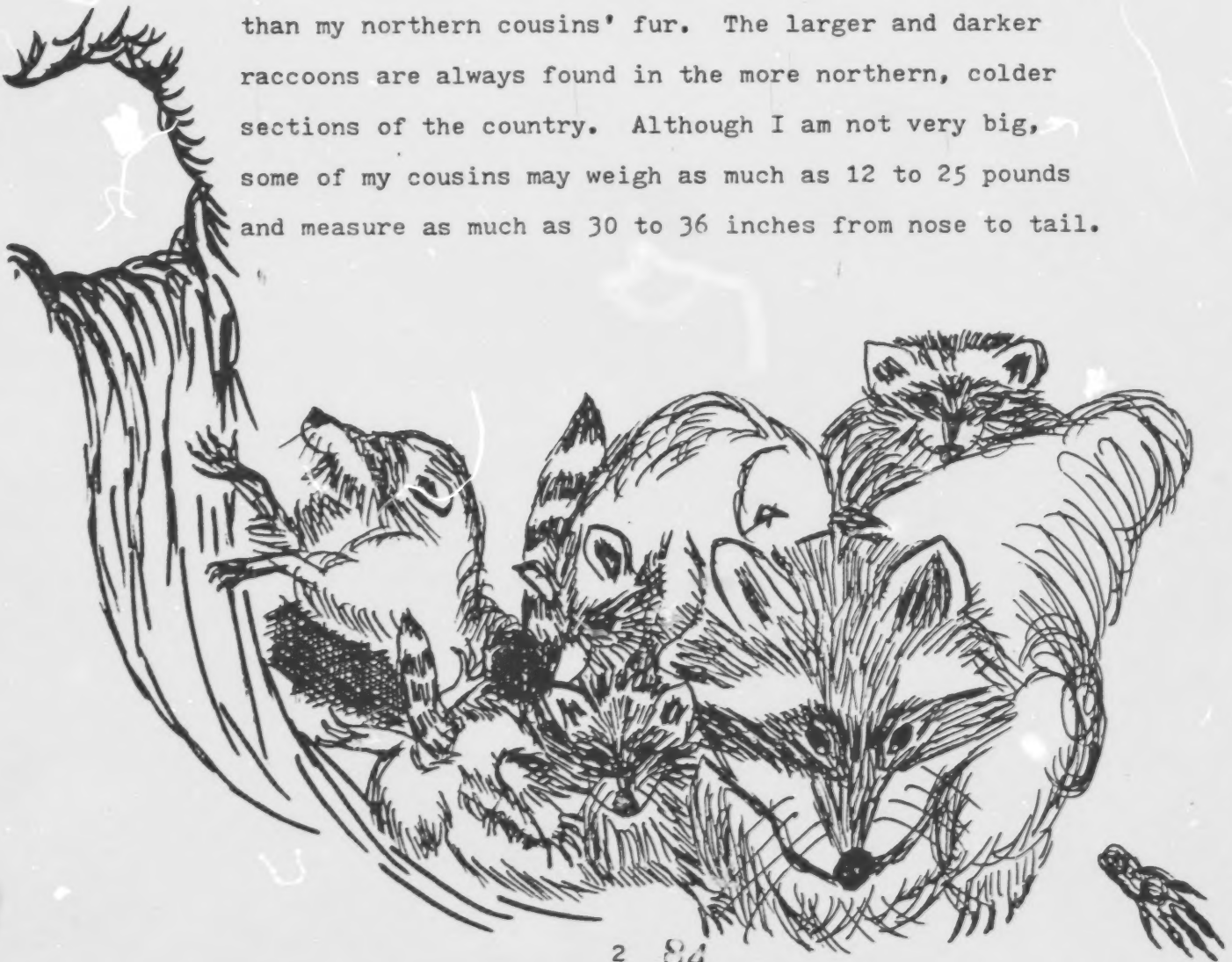




When the baby raccoons were born, they were covered with a light, fuzzy fur. They already had a hint of the black, masklike band across their faces, and the four to six black rings around their tails. Their eyes were tightly shut and

they slept most of the time.

Now my babies look more like me. I am one of the smaller raccoons and my fur is brown and lighter in color than my northern cousins' fur. The larger and darker raccoons are always found in the more northern, colder sections of the country. Although I am not very big, some of my cousins may weigh as much as 12 to 25 pounds and measure as much as 30 to 36 inches from nose to tail.





When I go out for food, it will be dark. But I won't go far from my tree and my babies. If I am gone too long the young ones will begin to whimper, just like a human baby might do. When my babies are older they will make many sounds like barks, growls, or a chirring sound that might be mistaken for the whoo-oo-oo of an owl.







When the babies were about four weeks old, they began to move around and explore their home in the tree. They played and climbed and tumbled about. All of this was good for them. A raccoon must be a good climber.

When the raccoons were about a month and half old, they began trying to get out of their tree home. They wanted to know what was beyond the hole high in the tree.



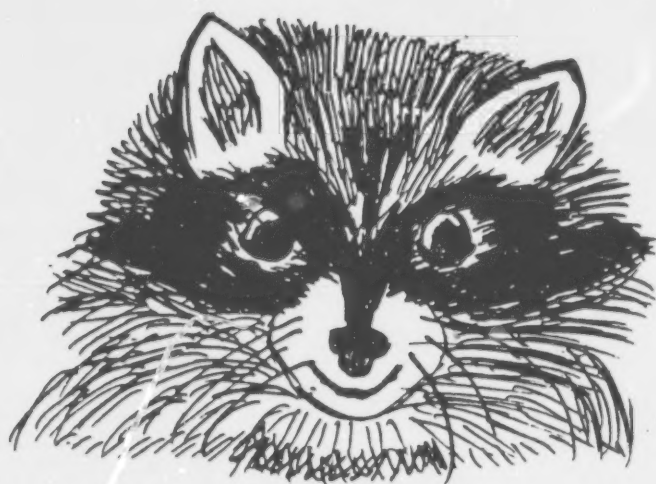


Soon after this I taught my babies to climb down the tree. Some raccoons go down a tree head first, some tail first. The baby raccoons took some falls. But each time I would pick them up and let them try again. I would pick up the young ones in my mouth and carry them by the loose skin on the back of their necks. Even those times the babies fell, they didn't hurt themselves. Their thick, ringed tails would help them break the falls from the tree.



Raccoon  
Tail





Soon my little family was out in the world. The young ones had to learn how to find food. How to catch a quick frog, or dig for the ones still asleep in the mud by the river. Raccoons like to eat their food near the water's edge. That is the way we like our food the best---wet.

frog



eggs



fish



insects  
worms  
mice  
snails  
fruit  
nuts  
berries

corn



Please serve  
with water



bread



cake



All raccoons like to eat the small animals that live near or in the water. We like to eat their eggs, too. We like to eat berries, fruit, and acorns. Raccoons have learned to like the foods that man eats. When other foods are not available, raccoons that live near the homes of people will find lots to like in a garbage can. Scrapes of bread, cake, meat, vegetables, and peelings of fruit are tasty morsels to a raccoon.

In the north where food is scarce in the cold months, my northern cousins will spend most of the time asleep. Sometimes they may wake up during warmer spells. Here in the south, we keep busy all year round.

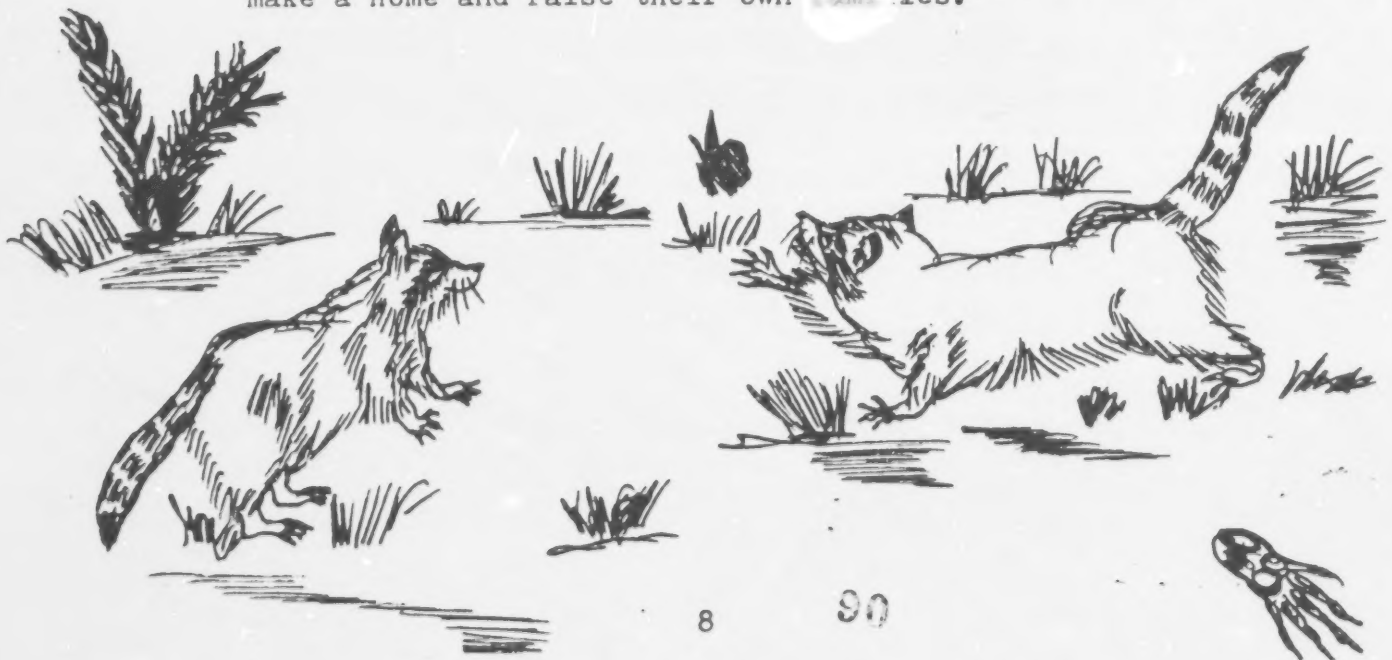
Once I took my babies on a trip to a local farm. We took this trip at night and we had to be careful of dogs. We were looking for one of the raccoons favorite foods---corn. Raccoons love the young, sweet ears of corn. Sometimes raccoons can be a nuisance to a farmer, if they raid his corn patch. Many farmers will shoot or put out traps for raccoons that raid their property.

Raccoons must be watchful when they are out at night hunting for food.





I have to teach my baby raccoons to be careful of danger when they explore through their area at night. Even though raccoons are social animals, traveling and feeding in family groups, we all have certain areas we like to stay within. That's right! Most raccoons have their own areas where they roam and hunt for food. We seldom wander into each other's areas, except when the daddy raccoon comes to visit. This will be when my babies are almost a year old. Then they will go out and find their own areas and their own trees. Here they will make a home and raise their own families.



The young raccoon's first choice for a home will be a hollow hole high in a tree. Although they may have to settle for a hollow stump. The tree needs to be high to be safe from enemies. We like high trees because they give us a nice place to bask in the sun. Raccoons love to lay around in the sun. My babies and I like to sprawl out on the branches of the tree and sleep away the daytime hours.

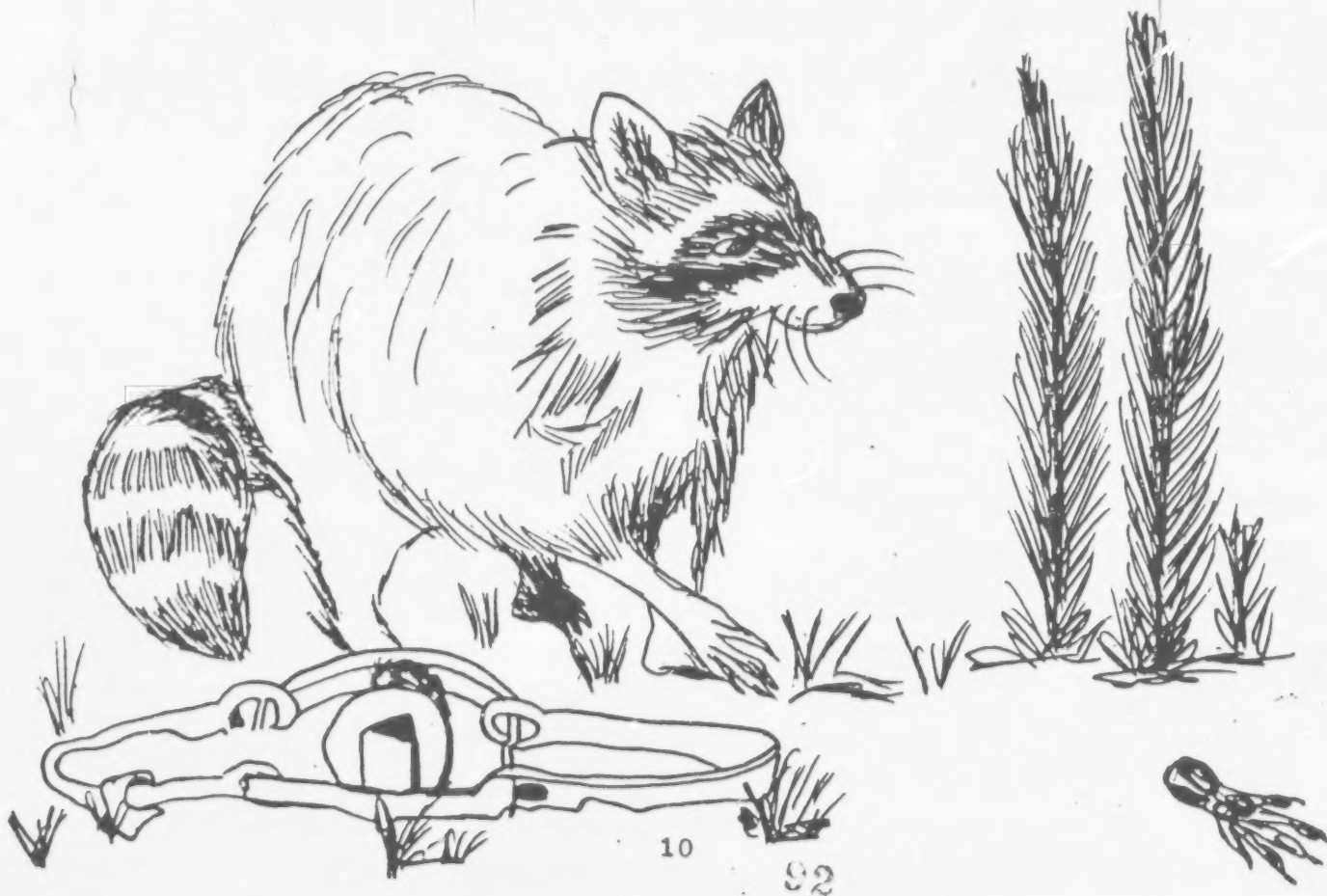


While my babies are young I will help them look for food. I will also teach them to watch for danger. There are other larger animals that hunt us for food. That is the way of nature. Also, we must lookout for man's friend, the dog. He likes to chase raccoons. When we go near farms and other people places, we have to be very careful of dogs. We have to watch out for people, too.

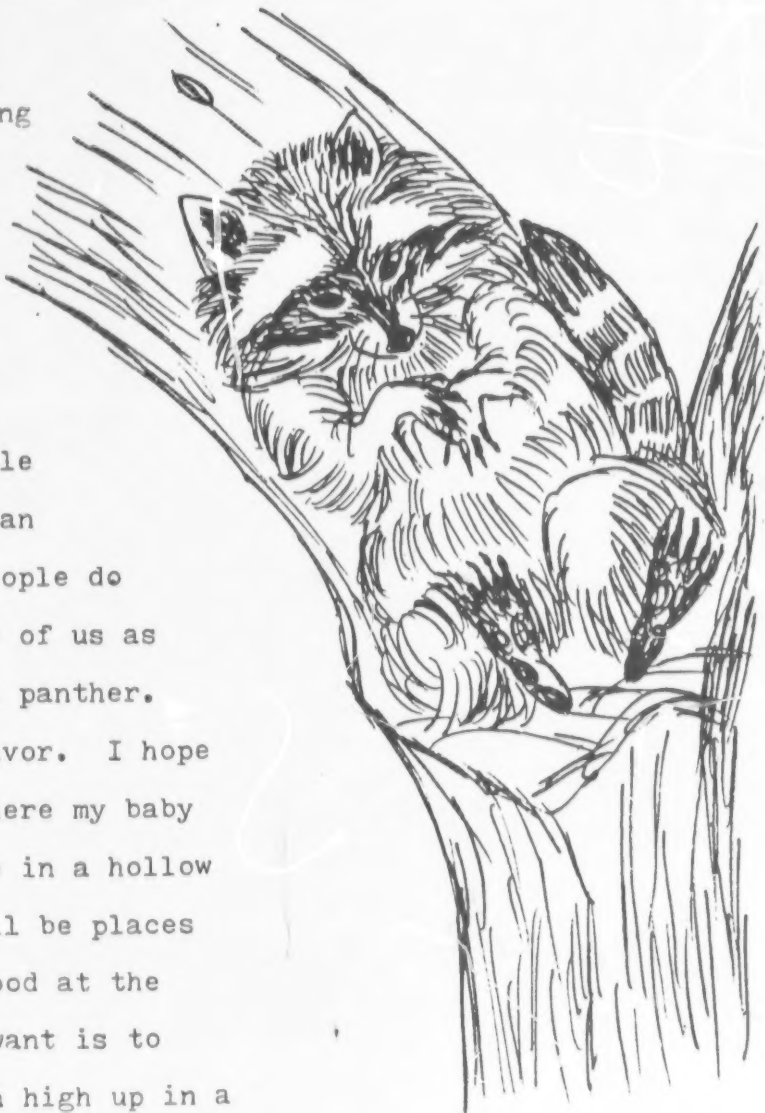


Some people are very fond of raccoons. They like to watch us and sometimes even leave food for us. But some people like to hunt us. They hunt us with guns and dogs. Some catch us with dangerous traps. A raccoon must be smart and watch for these dangers.

For many years, man has hunted and trapped the raccoon. There were times in history when our fur was very popular with people. Our fur is not as popular or as expensive now as it once was, but still people will buy it. Raccoons are not as endangered as some of our other animal friends, and people do not think of us as a rare or endangered animal. So many people do not know that we need protection too.



Hunting and trapping are just part of the problem. Areas that once were just for animals are now places for people. Raccoons seem to have less trouble living around people than some other animals. People do not seem to have a fear of us as they do the bear or the panther. Maybe that is in our favor. I hope there will be places where my baby raccoons and I can live in a hollow tree. I hope there will be places where we can eat our food at the water's edge. All we want is to stretch out on a branch high up in a tree and doze in the sun.





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